Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qurʾan

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	h/t
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

This volume of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī's *al-Mīzān fi Tafsir al-Qurʾān*, commonly referred to as *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, offers elaboration on and explanation of three mid-length sūrahs of the Holy Qur'an: Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ (Sūrah 28, The Story), Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt (Sūrah 29, The Spider), and Sūrah al-Rūm (Sūrah 30, The Romans—or, one might say, The Byzantines). Some readers may be particularly familiar with the last two sūrahs due to their yearly recitation on the Night of Destiny in the month of Ramadan.

Revealed in Mecca, these sūrahs share the common theme of finding hope during times of persecution, particularly persecution for one's faith; this theme, as well as the broader philosophical advice offered in these sūrahs, is as relevant today as it was then—perhaps even more so. As do other sūrahs of the Holy Qur'an, these sūrahs tell of the stories of the ancients and draw parallels between the hardships they faced and the challenges faced by the early followers of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ focuses heavily on the story of Prophet Moses—one of the most oft-mentioned stories in the Qur'an—and emphasizes the themes of divine assistance, miracles, and the divine plan. While, at the height of Pharaoh's rule, tyranny may have appeared to have had the upper hand, but it was only transient, as only truth and righteousness can ultimately persist. When Moses was born, and even his mother feared for his life, none of his people could have predicted that not only would he be cared for by their worst enemy, but he would flee his homeland only to return and face down the tyrant, then lead his people to safety. Hope in times of tyranny is also reiterated in later narrations from the Imams after the Prophet; and, perhaps needless to say, many prominent Shia scholars and reformers of ʿAllāmah's generation understood the reference to Pharaoh to be archetypal rather than specific, and equally applicable to tyrants of their era.

Additionally, the ʿAllāmah responds to the twentieth century's increasing interest in interfaith studies by comparing the understanding of Moses and Aaron in the Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament in a special section entitled "The Story of Moses and Aaron in the Current Text of the Torah." A shared heritage does not always mean a shared understanding, and discussions like this help Muslims and members of other faiths

to appreciate both the similarities and differences in their traditions. Furthermore, as is customary in his work, the ʿAllāmah includes numerous narrations offering details of the story of Moses to further explicate the Islamic view as well as the teachings of the Shia Imams.

The next two sūrahs, Sūrah al-ʿAnkabut and Sūrah al-Rūm, continue the theme of finding hope in times of trial. While they do reference the past, they encourage taking a broader, more philosophical view of human existence. One particular point of emphasis is history. These sūrahs encourage looking at the ruins of the ancients—either physically, in terms of seeing them and taking lessons from them; or at least mentally, in terms of considering them—to recognize that might does not equate permanence. While some ancient peoples (perhaps, many ancient peoples) had a more glorious civilization than the one that surrounded the Prophet, it is the spirituality and righteousness of a civilization that determine its fate, not its technology, nor its splendor. Thus, many peoples passed on. Indeed, the name "The Romans" carries similar connotations today; and this theme is just as relevant today given the concerns over the direction of humanity.

Another important theme here is that the earth is, first and foremost, the property of God. If people cannot thrive in one land, they not only have the right to migrate, they have the obligation to; nor should they fear poverty, for God is the real sustainer. Just as God cared for them in one land, He will care for them in another. And, if their faith suffers due to staying in one region, they will be held accountable for this in the next life, unless they were truly unable to leave. These are particularly relevant sentiments given the tension in many countries today over immigration and the accommodation of refugees.

Sūrah al-Rūm also introduces the concept of the *fiṭrah*, or the human being's innate disposition towards God and universal ethical virtues. This topic, like the above, is also particularly relevant today, given the trend towards a materialistic and relativistic understanding of the human being. The ʿAllāmah also provides the topic of the *fiṭrah* its own special discussion section.

Another discussion integrated throughout Sūrah al-ʿAnkabut is how indeed prayer *prevents indecencies and wrongs* (29:45); this discussion should be of particular interest to anyone who approaches prayers regularly, of whatever faith. Beyond that, as in the rest of the Qur'an, we are

reminded that our time on earth is fleeting, and our permanent existence is in the afterlife; and that we should view our own existence in that context.

It goes without saying that the translation (as always in this series) is exquisite and sensitive to detail and nuance, and is a pleasure to read. Both translators have paid enormous attention to detail and have approached the text with a thoughtfulness that contributes to a quality volume all around. As with many craftsmen, the best translator is invisible, and the quality of their artisanship is shown by the fact that it reads fluidly in and of itself without feeling like a translation, and provides clarity to a text that can be challenging to read, even in the original.

Their efforts will be a success if the readers find this volume a source of erudition and enlightenment!

Amina Inloes (Editor)
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About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers, particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and

1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical

and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam*. The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 28

al-Qaṣaṣ (The Story)

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Verses 1-14

The aim of this sūrah is to convey a beautiful, hope-inspiring promise to the believers while they were still in Mecca before the migration to Medina. This was at a time when the believers were a small group of people whom the tyrants from the tribe of Quraysh oppressed, persecuted, and behaved arrogantly towards. Those were the days of acute hardship, difficulty, and trial for the believers. The promise that this sūrah aimed to convey to the believers in Mecca was that God would bestow favors on them, make them leaders and heirs, strengthen them, and grant them power while the oppressive tyrants from their people would witness from them that which they feared.

Thus, in this sūrah God narrates to the persecuted Meccan believers a portion of the story of Moses and the Pharaoh, in that He created Moses at a time when the Pharaoh was at the apogee of his power. The Pharaoh used to behave arrogantly towards the Children of Israel, persecuting them. This involved slaughtering their sons while sparing their daughters. Thus He had Moses raised and nurtured in the very lap of the enemy till he grew up and attained maturity, which is when He rescued him and brought him out from the midst of the Pharaoh and his people towards Midian. Thereafter He returned Moses to them as a messenger from Himself coupled with clear authority up until the time when He drowned Pharaoh and his army altogether, rendering the Children of Israel heirs. Additionally, He sent the Torah to Moses as guidance, endowed with insight for the believers.

Thus the destiny of the persecuted believers would follow this course, and in this, there was a promise for the believers in Mecca of dominance, honor, integrity, and authority, and a promise to the Prophet of an ultimate successful return.

Thereafter God shifts from the story of Moses and the Pharaoh, and proceeds to explain that it is imperative in God's wisdom that He should reveal a book from Himself that calls to the truth. Thereafter He mentions

the unbelievers' vilifying contention regarding the Qur'an's call by quoting their words: *Why is he not given the like of what was given to Moses?* (28:48) following them up with a rejoinder from Himself. He also mentions their excuse for not believing in the Qur'an's call by quoting what they said: *If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country* (28: 57) following it up with a rejoinder (from Himself). Finally, the narrative contains a warning in the form of the story of Korah and his humiliating destruction, which took place by him being swallowed up.

This sūrah is of Meccan provenance as attested to by the context of its verses. What we have cited of its verses here-below is a section from the story of Moses and the Pharaoh from the day Moses was born till he reached maturity.

طسم ﴿١﴾ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ ﴿٢﴾

(28:1-2) Ṭāʾ sīn mīm. ***These are the verses of the Book that makes [things] clear.***

An explanation for these two verses has already been made previously, in the commentary of similar verses.

نَتْلُو عَلَيْكَ مِنْ نَبَإِ مُوسَىٰ وَفِرْعَوْنَ بِالْحَقِّ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(28:3) ***We recite to you from the account of Moses and the Pharaoh with truth for people who believe.***

The meaning intended to be conveyed is: "We are reciting to you a recital that is enveloped—or encompassed or covered and clad—with the truth. Thus it is a recital from Us and a revelation from Us without the devils interfering or intervening in its recital or delivery."[1]

Another possible meaning is: "The state and condition of the account

1 The preposition *min* that occurs in this verse (*natlū ʿalayka min nabaʾi Mūsā wa firʿawna*, with *min* translated as "from") is used to give the meaning of "a portion of" something rather than the whole (*al-tabʿīḍ*), while the phrase *bi al-ḥaqq* in this verse (*natlū ʿalayka min nabaʾi Mūsā wa firʿawna bi al-ḥaqq*, translated as "with the truth") relates to the (first person plural imperfect tense) verb *natlū* (that occurs at the very beginning of this verse and which is translated as "We recite"). Thus the phrase *bi al-ḥaqq* qualifies it by describing its state. (Auth.)

which We are reciting to you is that it is covered with the truth, and therefore there is no doubt in it."[1]

As for the part of this verse (28:3) that reads *for people who believe*, the meaning intended to be conveyed is: "We are reciting to you *a portion of* their account (that is, the account of Moses and the Pharaoh) *for the sake of* or *for the benefit of* a people who believe in Our signs."[2]

Hence the meaning obtained is: "We are reciting to you, O Muḥammad, some of—or a portion of—the account of Moses and the Pharaoh. It is a recital that is covered with the truth, so that these people who believe in Our signs and are from those who follow and obey you, who are a humble and abject group, and are persecuted at the hands of the tyrants of the Quraysh, may consider and reflect on it and thereby ascertain and realize with certainty that God in whom and in whose messenger they believe, and for whose sake they have borne all kinds of hardship and harm, is the same God who nurtured and raised Moses in order to enliven the truth, save the Children of Israel, and strengthen and consolidate them after they had experienced that ignominious humiliation and servility where the Pharaoh slaughtered their sons while sparing their daughters. This was at a time when the Pharaoh had exalted himself in the land and had sunk into the Children of Israel the talons of his overbearing reign making it all-pervasive, thereby encompassing them with his tyranny and injustice."

Thus God nurtured and brought Moses up during those times—dark times indeed, which were devoid of any scope for hope or aspiration, yet He raised Moses in the very lap of his enemy and then brought him out of Egypt, subsequently returning him to them with authority. Then He rescued the Children of Israel and destroyed Pharaoh and his army by means of Moses, thereby rendering the Pharaoh and his army a mere illusion, a mere story, and a dream.

Thus it is God relating the story of Moses, Pharaoh, and the Children

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1 In this case, the phrase *bi al-ḥaqq* pertains to the word *naba'* that occurs in this verse ("account"); it qualifies *naba'* rather than the verb *natlū*. (Auth.)

2 The letter *lām* here is known as *lām al-ta'līl*. This part of the verse relates to the verb *natlū* ("We recite"). (Auth.)
The letter *lām* with this particular identification serves to indicate that the speech following the letter explains the purpose and justification for the speech that preceded it and therefore the letter *lām* here has the meaning of "for the benefit of" and "for the sake of." (Trans.)

of Israel to His Prophet, designating the Prophet and his followers as a *people who believe*, in that He shall deal with the tyrants from the Quraysh in a manner similar to the way He dealt with the Pharaoh and his army, and that He shall bestow favors on the oppressed and persecuted believers of Mecca, making them leaders and heirs in a manner similar to how He did with the Children of Israel.

إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضْعِفُ طَائِفَةً مِنْهُمْ
يُذَبِّحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٤﴾

(28:4) ***Surely Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and made its people into parties, weakening one party from among them; he slaughtered their sons and let their women live; he was one of the mischief makers.***

The mention of "exaltation in the land" that occurs in *surely Pharaoh exalted himself in the land* (28:4) means "to demonstrate one's strength and power and to behave with arrogance." The term *shiyaʿan* that occurs in this verse is the plural of the term *shīʿa*. The latter term means "a party" (*firqa*, also meaning "a group" or "a band"). The plural noun *shiyaʿ* is defined in (the Qur'anic commentary) *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* as follows:

It means "parties, groups" (*firaq*), and every party or group is called *shīʿa*. They are called thus because they (that is, those who constitute its members) follow one another.

"Rendering the people of the land into parties" is a reference to the people of Egypt. The definite particle *al* ("the" in *the land*) has the effect of rendering the word definite and specific: it specifies that the land in question is Egypt.[1] Thus the intended meaning of *and made its people into parties* (28:4) is "to cast differences between and among them" so that they could not unite or agree on one position and so that they would not be

1 Sayyid Ṭabātabāʾi intends to explain that the phrase "the land" (*al-arḍ*) implies a possessive construct that is shortened. The implied possessive construct is *(fī) arḍ-i miṣr*, translated as "in the land of Egypt"; however, the genitive (*miṣr*—Egypt) has been dropped while only its noun (*arḍ*, land) has been retained, thereby shortening the possessive construct, and consequently the definite article *al-* is prefixed to the noun of the implied possessive construct, it being *ipso facto* definite. This renders it *al-arḍ* (the land), which is definite, and therefore indicates a specific land, Egypt. (Trans.)

able to revolt against the Pharaoh and reverse the situation against him. This is the practice of kings in their effort to expand their power and strengthen their authority. "Letting their women live" (28:4) means "to spare their lives and to let them live."

Hence the meaning obtained is that the Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and dominated it by extending his authority over the people and entrenching his power among them. He divided the inhabitants of the land into different groups and parties so that their position on any matter would not be a united one. As a result, he undermined their general ability to resist him in the face of his own power and weakened their capability to stop him from entrenching his will.

He persecuted a party from among them, which was the party of the Children of Israel who were the progeny of Jacob. They had dwelt in Egypt ever since Joseph brought his father and brothers there and out from their previous place of domicile. Thus they had settled there and had procreated till their numbers reached the thousands.

This pharaoh, who was the king of Egypt and a contemporary of Moses, used to treat them like captive slaves. He increased his persecution of them till he reached a point in his persecution where he ordered their sons to be slaughtered while sparing their daughters. Through this policy, he aimed to annihilate their menfolk by killing their male offspring, thereby wiping out the community.

The reason for that was that he was one of those who wrought mischief in the land and spread corruption in it. Creation in general, which brought forth humanity, did not discriminate between one group of humanity and another on the plane of existence. It prepared them all by guiding them to a social life based on enjoying the goods of this earthly life while everyone has a standing which equals their worth in society, and which equals their significance in social cooperation and collaboration.

This is the peaceful and reformed state of affairs that creation advocates, whilst transgressing against this principle by rendering one group of people free and others slaves and allowing one group to enjoy that which it does not deserve while denying others that which they do deserve is a type of corruption that leads humanity to destruction.

Thus this verse contains a description of the times during which Moses was born: a time-period during which destructive factors had surrounded, encompassed, and overwhelmed the Children of Israel from all

sides, and which aimed to destroy and annihilate Moses.

وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ
الْوَارِثِينَ ۝٥ وَنُمَكِّنَ لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنُرِيَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَجُنُودَهُمَا
مِنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَحْذَرُونَ ۝٦

(28:5-6) ***While We desired to bestow a favor upon those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them the Imams, and to make them the heirs. And to grant them power in the land, and to make Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts see from them what they feared.***

Here is what we can deduce from al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī:

> The verbal noun *al-mann* originally means "something that is significant, heavy, and weighty."

From this, the thing with which something is weighed is called *mannun,* while the term *al-minna* means a blessing or favor that is significant and weighty, and therefore the sentence: *manna ʿalayhi mannan* means: "He granted him a significant and weighty blessing or favor." Such a bestowal of favors may be said to take place in two ways. The first is by means of an act, an example of which is this verse under discussion: *While We desired to bestow a favor upon those who were oppressed* (28:5). This means: "We shall grant them favors and blessings, which shall prove significant and weighty for them."

The second manner by which a bestowal of favors may be said to take place is by means of speech. An example of this is verse 49:17: *They think that they lay you under an obligation by becoming Muslims* (*yamunnūna ʿalayka an aslamū*). Such an attitude [of obliging someone for favors done] is reprehensible except in cases of manifest ingratitude for blessings bestowed. That is when a person falsely denies having had been granted a blessing, thereby manifesting their ingratitude.

And to grant them power in the land (28:6) means "granting them a place and an abode in the land which they would own and in which they would settle."[1]

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1 Al-Khalīl says: The term *al-makān* is modelled on the pattern of *al-mafʿal*. The term *al-makān* is derived from (the verbal noun) *al-kawn*; however, due

The implied meaning is: "Pharaoh oppressed a party (*ṭāʾifa*) from among them (that is, from among his subjects). He persecuted them *while* (the actual state of affairs in respect of this persecuted party was that) We (that is, God) intended to bestow favors on those oppressed who were subjected to persecution."[1]

It is also suggested that this verse (28:5) serves as a conjunction to His speech in the previous verse, which reads: *Surely Pharaoh exalted himself in the land…* (28:4); however, the first interpretation is more apparent.[2]

And to make them the Imams (28:5) serves as a conjunction to *and We desired to bestow a favor…* (28:5), and the same explanation applies to the sentences that follow.

Hence the meaning obtained is that the situation obtained at that time was one during which the Pharaoh exulted in the land by demonstrating his strength and power and behaving with arrogance. He divided the people into parties and persecuted the Children of Israel, attempting to exterminate and annihilate them while the actual state of affairs was that God intended to bestow favors on these who were oppressed and who were subjected to persecution from all sides—favors that would prove

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to excessive usage of this term in speech, it evolved from the form *mafʿal* (*makwan*) into the form *faʿāl* (*makān*). Thus, examples are *tamakkana* ("he gained influence, prestige, and power," "he became consolidated and well-established") and *tamaskana* ("he became calm, tranquil, and sedate") in the sense of *tamanzala* (meaning "to be settled," "to be lodged"). (Auth.)

1 As for *While We desired to bestow a favor* (28:5), it is more appropriate that it be considered as denoting the state and condition (*al-ḥāl*) for the word *ṭāʾifa* ("*a party*," mentioned in 28:4). (Auth.)
Therefore verse 28:5 is grammatically identified as a verbal *ḥāl* verse meaning that it consists of a verbal sentence that describes the state or condition of *ṭāʾifa*—"a party," a state which was obtained for it at the time when the action of the verb *yastaḍʿifu* (translated as: 'to weaken'), which occurs in the previous verse, took place. Therefore the letter *wāw* at the beginning of this verse is identified as the *wāw* of *ḥāl* better translated as "while." It joins two verses or two sentences such that the second verse or sentence denotes the state and condition of the subject or object of a verb in the previous verse or sentence. In this case it denotes the state and condition of the word *ṭāʾifa* ("a party") which occurs as the grammatical object of the verb *yastaḍʿifu* in 28:4. (Trans.)

2 In any case, the verb *nurīdu* (translated as *We intend*) intends to relate a past continuous state [implying that while the Pharaoh persecuted the Children of Israel, God intended to bestow favors on them]. (Auth.)

significant and weighty for them. This would transpire by Him making them leaders who would serve as exemplars. Therefore, they would be followed after they had been followers, and it would transpire by Him making them heirs, inheriting the land, after it was in the possession of others. God intended to consolidate them in the land in the sense of granting them a place and an abode in which they would settle and which they would own after they had had no place of their own save what others intended to lodge them in and what others endorsed for them. In addition, God intended to show Pharaoh, who was the king of Egypt, and Hāmān who was his minister, and their people, what they feared from these who were persecuted which was that the Children of Israel would overcome them and take away their kingdom, wealth, and mode of life just as the Pharaoh and his people accused Moses and his brother of when they both were sent to them as warners. This is described in: *They said: These are most surely two magicians who wish to turn you out from your land by their magic and to take away your best traditions*. (20:63)

Thus these two verses describe what lay latent beneath this frightful time period, a time period that had decreed that no [male] breathing soul from among the Children of Israel would remain alive, nor one who could ignite the flames of revolt or the sparks of rebellion. This was also the time when the tyrannical power of the Pharaoh had encompassed and overwhelmed the Children of Israel thoroughly while his fear and awe had filled their lives and existence, in that he persecuted them till he decreed destruction and annihilation for them. This was the apparent state of affairs, while what lay latent beneath it was the divine intent relating to the rescue and salvation of the Children of Israel from the Pharaoh and his people, and the transfer of the significant blessings from the people of the Pharaoh who were powerful and elevated in the land to the Children of Israel who were humble and persecuted. This included an alteration in the factors detrimental to the Children of Israel, which would be transferred to the Pharaoh and his people, while the positive factors that were in favor of the latter would be transferred to the former, for surely God decides and nothing rescinds His decision.

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ ۖ فَإِذَا خِفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا
تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي ۖ إِنَّا رَادُّوهُ إِلَيْكِ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ۝٧

(28:7) *And We revealed* (awḥaynā, from al-īḥāʾ) *to Moses' mother: Give him suck, then when you fear for him, cast him (fa al-qīhi, from al-ilqāʾ) into the river and do not fear nor grieve; We will bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers.*

The verbal noun *al-īḥāʾ* means "a secret address." It is used in the Qur'an with respect to God's communication with some of His creatures by means of inspiration, and casting an instruction into the heart, as is mentioned in: *Because your Lord had inspired her [the earth]* (*bi-anna rabbaka awḥā lahā*) (99:5) as well as in: *And your Lord revealed to the bee…* (*wa awḥā rabbuka ilā al-naḥli*) (16:68), and in this verse under discussion: *And We revealed to Moses' mother…* (*wa awḥāynā ilā ummi Mūsā…*) (28:7). From another perspective, it is also used to describe God's communication with the prophets and messengers. As regards to the usage of this term with respect to a secret address from a being other than God, it appears in *and most surely the satans suggest to their friends…* (*inna al-shayāṭīna layūḥūna ilā awliyāʾihim*, 6:121). As for the verbal noun *al-ilqāʾ*, it means "to cast something," while the word *al-yamm* means "a sea" or "a big river."

And We revealed to Moses' mother… (28:7) has been rendered concise and abridged, and the abridgement is due to an elision. The implied meaning therefore is: "Moses' mother conceived him in such circumstances as these—circumstances of severe and acute hardship—and then she gave birth to him, which is when We inspired her."

Thus the meaning obtained is: "We communicated with the mother of Moses by means of a type of inspiration when she gave him birth, saying: Breast-feed him so long as you do not fear harm for him from the Pharaoh; however, when and if you fear harm for him in that the people of the Pharaoh would come to know of him and therefore seize and kill him, then cast him into the river—which is the river Nile, as has been transmitted in a tradition—and then do not fear that he will be killed nor be sad or distraught upon losing him or upon being separated from him. We shall return him to you subsequently and make him a messenger. Thus he shall become a messenger sent to the people of the Pharaoh and the Children of Israel."

The phrase *We will bring him back to you…* (28:7) serves as justification for the prohibition *and do not grieve* that occurs (earlier) in this verse. This justification is also attested to in: *So We gave him back to his mother*

that her eye might be refreshed, and that she might not grieve… (28:13).

The difference between "fear" (*al-khawf*) and "grief" (*al-ḥuzn*) in this context is that "fear" is with respect to something unfortunate that might happen, whereas "grief" refers to something unfortunate that will certainly happen.

فَالْتَقَطَهُ آلُ فِرْعَوْنَ لِيَكُونَ لَهُمْ عَدُوًّا وَحَزَنًا ۗ إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَجُنُودَهُمَا كَانُوا خَاطِئِينَ ﴿٨﴾

(28:8) *And Pharaoh's family took him up* (fa iltaqaṭahu, from al-iltiqāṭ) *that he might be an enemy and a grief for them; Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts were erroneous.*

The verbal noun *al-iltiqāṭ* means "coming across or stumbling upon something unexpectedly without seeking it, and then picking it up." From it is derived the noun *al-luqṭa* which means "something that is found." What is actually meant by the word *ḥazanan* ("grief") in this verse is "the cause of grief," where the application of the word *ḥazanan* to Moses is in the nature of exaggeration in light of the fact that it is he who would be the cause of their grief.[1]

The difference between the active participles *al-khāṭiʾu* and *al-mukhṭiʾu*, according to al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, is that:

> The former active participle is applied to a person who undertakes an act but does not do it well and yet carries it out [and therefore errs]. God reprimands: *to kill them is a great error* (*inna qatlahum kāna khiṭʾan kabīra*, 17:31), and He narrates [the speech of the brothers of Joseph]: *and we were certainly erroneous* (*in kunnā lakhāṭʾīna*, 12:91), while the latter active participle is applied to a

1 The letter *lām* ("that") which occurs in this verse has its function suggested as *lām al-ʿāqiba*. As for the word *ḥazanan* ("grief") that occurs in this verse then whether it occurs with two *fatḥas* (on the letters *ḥ* and *z*, respectively as it does in this verse) or with a *fatḥa* and a *sukūn* (on the letters *ḥ* and *z*, respectively, that is *ḥaznan*), it means one and the same, and is similar (in form) to the words *al-saqam* and *al-saqm* (which mean "illness, sickness"). (Auth.)
The letter *lām* with this particular identification serves to indicate that the speech following it denotes "the outcome or the consequence of something that has gone before—*al-ʿāqiba*." In this case, it serves to indicate the outcome of the verb *iltaqaṭa* which is translated as "took him up." (Trans.)

person who undertakes an act and does it well; however, something contrary to what he intended happens from him. The verbal noun for the former is *al-khaṭaʾu* with two *fatḥa*s (on the letters *kh* and *ṭ* respectively). An example of the usage of this noun (that is, *al-khaṭaʾu*) occurs in the verse *and whoever kills a believer by error* (*wa man qatala muʾminan khaṭaʾan*, 4:92). Therefore a comprehensive meaning of this word is "to deviate" or "to veer away from the (intended) course" or "to err."[1]

Hence, *Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts were erroneous* (28:8) means that the violence they were perpetrating against the Children of Israel and Moses in order to thwart the destruction of their kingdom, and in fear of the loss of their authority at the hands of the Children of Israel, was tantamount to intending to alter destiny from running its course. Therefore they murdered a very large number of the male offspring when they had no right to do so, and left Moses alive whence they found him and raised him in their own laps while it was by means of him and at his hands that their kingdom was to be destroyed and pass away.

Consequently, the meaning obtained is that the people of the Pharaoh stumbled across Moses and picked him up from the river where the intended consequence (*al-ʿāqiba*) of that was that he should prove to be an adversary for them and a cause of grief for them. The Pharaoh, Hāmān and their people grossly erred in murdering the male offspring of the Children of Israel while letting Moses live, in that they planned to kill the one who was to destroy them but ended up striving to safeguard him and to look after him, making diligent efforts at raising him. Therefore here, the inappropriateness of the interpretation of some who explain the *khaṭaʾ* of the Pharaoh and his people to mean that they were sinful and therefore God punished them in that God made them raise their own enemy becomes manifestly clear from this explanation.[2]

وَقَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ فِرْعَوْنَ قُرَّتُ عَيْنٍ لِي وَلَكَ ۖ لَا تَقْتُلُوهُ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا

1 As for the word *al-khāṭiʾīna* that occurs in this verse and which is the active participle for the verb *khaṭaʾa yakhṭaʾu khaṭaʾan*. This is similar [in terms of derived verbal forms] to the verbs *ʿalima yaʿlamu ʿilman*.The word *al-mukhṭiʾu* is the active participle for the verb *akhṭaʾa yukhṭiʾu ikhṭāʾun*. (Auth.)

2 Hence translating the active participle *al-khāṭiʾīna* as "sinners" or "wrongdoers" rather than as "erroneous" is a mistake. (Trans.)

أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

(28:9) ***And Pharaoh's wife said: A refreshment of the eye to me and to you; do not slay him; maybe he will be useful to us, or we may take him for a son, and they did not perceive.***

This verse describes the intercession of the wife of the Pharaoh in favor of Moses. She was present besides Pharaoh when they brought forth Moses, a child picked up from the river. She addresses the Pharaoh with the words: *A refreshment of the eye to me and to you* (28:9), meaning "he is the delight of our eyes" She continues: *Do not slay him* (28:9) [using a second person plural verb in the jussive mood]. This statement indicates that those who would participate in the murder of Moses were many, including the cause, the one who would directly supervise the murder, the one who would give the order [of killing], and the one who would carry out the order.

She said what she did because God cast love from Himself in favor of Moses into her heart; thus, she became one who could not help herself from averting murder from him, and therefore she clasped him to herself. This favor that God had bestowed on Moses is described in verse 20:39: *And I cast down upon you love from Me, and that you might be brought up before My eyes.*

As for her statement in this verse: *maybe he will be useful to us, or we may take him for a son* (28:9), she uttered these words when she witnessed the signs of greatness and divine charisma on Moses' face, while her words *or we may take him for a son* (28:9) indicate that she and the Pharaoh had no son of their own.[1] Thus the meaning obtained is that the Pharaoh's wife said what she did, and interceded in favor of Moses and endeavored to avert his murder while the people did not perceive what they were doing, nor did they perceive the reality of the situation and its ultimate consequence.

وَأَصْبَحَ فُؤَادُ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ فَارِغًا ۖ إِنْ كَادَتْ لَتُبْدِي بِهِ لَوْلَا أَنْ رَبَطْنَا عَلَىٰ

1 A*nd they did not perceive* (28:9) is a sentence that is grammatically identified as *jumlatun ḥāliyyatun* (a sentence that describes a state and a condition). (Auth.)

قَلْبِهَا لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

(28:10) *And the heart of Moses' mother was free [from anxiety]. She would have almost disclosed* (tubdī, from al-ibdāʾ) *it had We not strengthened* (rabaṭnā, from al-rabṭ) *her heart so that she might be of the believers.*

The verbal noun *al-ibdāʾ* means "to disclose or reveal something or to make it manifest, to expose," while the verbal noun *al-rabṭ* means "to bind," "to make fast," "to tie," thereby serving to denote the sense of strengthening, fortifying, and consolidating something.

The part of this verse which reads *the heart of Moses' mother was free* (28:10) means her heart became free of fear and sadness. A necessary consequence of such a state of freedom from fear and sadness is that the heart is not convulsed by a succession of confused thoughts and conflicting illusions due to which the heart becomes unsettled, worried, perturbed, and confused. This latter state of anxiety and confusion would have made Moses' mother anxious, apprehensive, and alarmed, and consequently, she would have disclosed what she was supposed to hide and keep a secret regarding her son's existence.

Thus the meaning that comes across from the apparent context of this verse is that the reason she did not disclose the matter of her son was because her heart was free of anxiety and worry while the reason her heart was free of anxiety and worry was because of the strengthening and fortifying of her heart where the cause of that strengthening and fortification of the heart lay in God's inspiration to her by His words: *And do not fear nor grieve; We will bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers* (28:7).

In *she would have almost disclosed it had We not strengthened her heart*, the particle *in* is a contracted form or a lighter version of its heavier form *inna* (truly, certainly). This means "she was certainly on the verge of disclosing the secret of Moses' birth had We not fortified her heart by strengthening it and making it able to endure." *So that she might be of the believers* (28:10) means "so that she may be confident, convinced, and assured of God's protection of Moses, and so that thereby she may be patient and leave off worrying about him so that his matter may remain a secret."

The part of this verse which reads: *She would have almost disclosed*

it had We not strengthened her heart so that she might be of the believers (28:10) serves as an explanation for the beginning part of this verse, which reads: *And the heart of Moses' mother was free [from anxiety]* (28:10). Hence the meaning of the verse is that the heart of the mother of Moses became devoid of fear and grief as a result of our revealed inspiration, for otherwise, fear and grief would have certainly led to the disclosure of his birth. And had We not strengthened and fortified her heart by means of inspiration so that she may rest assured of God's protection of Moses she would have been on the verge of disclosing his existence to the Pharaoh and his people because of her worry and anxiety for him.

From the preceding explanation, the weakness and futility of what some have suggested as an explanation for this verse becomes self-evident, such as their interpretation of the part of the verse that reads *and the heart of Moses' mother was free* (28:10) in that it means she lost her mind due to what had overwhelmed her of fear and confusion when she heard of her child falling into the hands of the Pharaoh! Similarly weak is the opinion of those who suggest that it means her mind became devoid of the divine inspiration that had been made to her due to forgetfulness on her part, as well as the suggestion that her mind became devoid of everything save the thought of Moses, in that her mind became solely preoccupied with him. All these opinions as explanations for this part of the verse are perspectives which the context does not support.

Similarly weak is their opinion that the apodosis of the particles *law-lā* is elided where the implied meaning is: "Had We not strengthened her heart she would have disclosed him (*law lā an rabaṭnā ʿalā qalbihā la-abdathu wa aẓharathu*)." The reason for them considering this to be the implied meaning is due to the suggestion that the particles *law-lā* resemble the conditional particles. These have a protasis (the statement containing the condition) and an apodosis (the statement containing the response to the condition, expressing what will result from the condition) while it is claimed that the apodosis does not precede the protasis. The deliberation regarding this issue has already been presented in the commentary of: *And certainly, she made for him, and he would have made for her, were it not that he had seen the manifest evidence of his Lord* (12:24).[1]

1 There are two types of conditions in the Arabic language: unlikely and likely. A negative unlikely condition begins with the particles *law-lā* as is the case here. These particles form the protasis while the apodosis follows,

وَقَالَتْ لِأُخْتِهِ قُصِّيهِ ۖ فَبَصُرَتْ بِهِ عَنْ جُنُبٍ وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١١﴾

(28:11) ***And she said to his sister: Follow him*** **(quṣṣīhi, from al-qaṣṣ).** ***So she watched him from a distance while they did not perceive.***

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The verbal noun *al-qaṣṣ* is defined in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* as "following someone's tracks, to track someone [unobtrusively]." From this noun is derived the noun *al-qaṣaṣ* which means "a narrative," "a spoken story" since in it there is a succession of different words and ideas, the second following in the wake of the first, and so on. *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* also says:

The meaning of the sentence in this verse is: "The sister of Moses watched him from a distance or from afar (*ʿan buʿdin*)."

Hence the meaning obtained is that the mother of Moses said to his sister: "Follow and track Moses till you see where he and his matter end up." So Moses' sister watched him from afar and witnessed the servants of the Pharaoh picking him up while they did not know that she was

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more often than not beginning with the particle of emphasis *la*. Ideally, in a conditional sentence, the apodosis follows the protasis in sequence; however, sometimes the apodosis is elided and in such cases it must be understood from the context. Apparently, this explanation has been suggested by some commentators as applying to the conditional sentence in verse 28:10 but the author of this commentary rejects it as a weak explanation. At others, the apodosis precedes the protasis in a case of reversed condition. It appears that such an explanation is not favored by grammarians, nevertheless it occurs. The conditional sentence in verse 28:10 appears to be a case of a reversed condition and is considered by the author of this commentary to be similar to 12:24. However, most probably due to the unease that grammarians feel with having an apodosis precede its protasis in a conditional sentence, the author of this commentary explains or names the supposedly preceding apodosis in 12:24 as being not an apodosis proper but rather a sentence that is instead of, or in place of, or in the meaning of an apodosis. A similar explanation would therefore apply here, in 28:10, where the sentence *in kādat la-tubdī bihi*—"She would have almost disclosed it"—which is the supposedly preceding apodosis, would in effect be considered as being in the meaning of an apodosis but not the apodosis proper. Nevertheless, notwithstanding whichever of the two grammatical explanations is favored for identifying the grammatical apodosis for the conditional sentence in 28:10, the meaning of the verse and the meaning of the conditional sentence is not affected. The meaning is as explained by the author of this commentary in the text. (Trans.)

following and observing him.

وَحَرَّمْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَرَاضِعَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَقَالَتْ هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ بَيْتٍ يَكْفُلُونَهُ لَكُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُ نَاصِحُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(28:12) ***And We ordained that he would refuse to suck any other foster mother, so she said: Shall I point out to you the people of a house who will take care of him for you, and they will be benevolent to him?***

The prohibition to suck milk mentioned in this verse was at the creational level rather than at the legislative level. The meaning of the verse is that God rendered Moses such that he refused the breast of a wet-nurse, abstaining from accepting her milk, while the phrase *min qablu* (from before) that occurs in this verse means: "before the arrival of Moses' sister there and her approaching the Pharaoh and his people." The word *al-marāḍiʾu* that occurs in this verse is said to be the plural noun of the word *murḍiʾatun* (wet-nurse or foster mother or breast-feeder).

So she said: Shall I point out to you the people of a house who will take care of him for you, and they will be benevolent to him? This occurs as a concomitant to what has gone before although the literary context of the verses indicates an elision having had taken place as if it were said: "We forbade Moses from accepting the milk of any wet-nurse save his mother's before his sister's arrival." Thus every time they brought forth a wet nurse for him so that she could breast feed him, he would refuse her milk. Subsequently, when his sister arrived and saw the situation, she suggested at that moment to the people of the Pharaoh: *Shall I point out to you the people of a house who will take care of him for* your benefit, *and they will be benevolent to him?* (28:12)

فَرَدَدْنَاهُ إِلَىٰ أُمِّهِ كَيْ تَقَرَّ عَيْنُهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنَ وَلِتَعْلَمَ أَنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

(28:13) ***So We gave him back to his mother that her eye might be refreshed, and that she might not grieve, and that she might know that the promise of Allah is true, but most of them do not know.***

Again this verse occurs as a concomitant to what has preceded of the

narrative along with an implied elision that the literary context indicates. Thus the meaning obtained is that Moses' sister suggested: "Shall I lead you to the people of such and such a house?" and they acceded to her suggestion. Consequently, she led them to the mother of Moses to whom they turned him over. Hence *so We gave him back to his mother* (28:13) is a consequence of the progression of these events.

That her eye might be refreshed, and that she might not grieve, and that she might know that the promise of Allah is true: This serves as justification for the return of Moses to his mother, while *and that she might know* (28:13, in the same verse) means the certainty that comes about from physically seeing and witnessing the fulfilment of a prophecy. This is because she knew from before that the promise of God is true for she was a believer; however, the intent of returning Moses to his mother was so that she would know for certain by literally seeing and witnessing the fulfilment of the prophecy that the promise of God is true while what is meant by the promise of God being true is the absolute, unrestricted promise of God without exception. This is evidenced by *but most of them do not know* (28:13), meaning that most people do not believe with certainty in God's promises. They doubt His promises, their souls refusing to repose trust in them. Thus the meaning obtained is that a person should expect and anticipate by this true observation which God had promised the mother of Moses that the promises of God, in the absolute, unrestricted sense, and without exception, are true. Perhaps it may be said that what is meant by the "promise of God" is specifically the promise mentioned in *We will bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers* (28:7). However *but most of them do not know* (28:13) does not agree with such a restricted meaning and interpretation, as has been explained above.

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ وَاسْتَوَىٰ آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي
الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

(28:14) ***And when he attained his maturity and became full grown* (istawā)*, We granted him wisdom and knowledge; and thus do We reward those who do good [to others].***

The mention of "attaining maturity" that occurs in this verse, which reads *and when he attained his maturity* (28:14), refers to the stage in life in which the human being's strength and powers intensify and he becomes

strong and robust. This stage is generally considered to be actualized by the age of eighteen years. As for the verbal noun *al-istiwāʾ*, it means "straightness," "erectness," "stability," and "firmness." The application of this word to human life (*istiwāʾ al-ḥayāt*) means the quality of stability that the human being achieves in matters pertaining to his life. The point in time at which this quality is attained differs among individuals, but in most cases, it is considered actualized after attaining maturity.

With regards to the meaning of the terms *al-ḥukm* (wisdom), *al-ʿilm* (knowledge), and their granting by God to Moses, as well as the meaning of the term *al-iḥsān* (those who do good), all these terms have been explained at numerous places in this commentary.

Examining Narrations

(1) Regarding *and We desired to bestow a favor upon those who were oppressed in the land* (28:5-6), it is narrated that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib said: (It refers to) Joseph and his progeny.[1]

Author's comment: Perhaps his intent was the Children of Israel. If not, then it is evident that the apparent meaning of this verse is contrary to this identification.

(2) It is narrated from al-Mufaḍḍal:
Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "The Messenger of God looked at ʿAlī, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn, wept, and said: You are those who shall be oppressed and shall be persecuted after me."
I [al-Mufaḍḍal] asked: "What is the meaning of that?"
He replied: "The Prophet meant: You (in the plural) are the leaders after me. God says: *And We desired to bestow a favor upon those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them the Imams, and to make them the heirs* (28:5-6). Thus this verse applies to us till the Day of Resurrection."[2]

Author's comment: Traditions transmitted via Shiʿa chains of transmission that identify this verse as alluding to the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt are numerous, and it is apparent on the basis of this tradition that

1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr,* on the authority of Ibn Abī Shayba, Ibn al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

2 *Maʿānī al-Akhbār,* via its chain of narration on the authority of Muḥammad b. Sinān, on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal b. ʿUmar who heard it from the Imam.

this and all such traditions are examples of applying the verse to them (*al-jary wa al-taṭbīq*).

(3) It is narrated from Imam ʿAlī:

"The world shall certainly incline to us after its intransigent recalcitrance, just as a protective she-camel fiercely inclines to its young [in order to defend it]."

Thereafter he recited (28:5): *And We desired to bestow a favor upon those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them the Imams, and to make them the heirs.*[1]

(4) It is narrated from Imam al-Bāqir regarding *And We revealed to Moses' mother…* (28:7):

When his mother conceived him, her pregnancy did not show, becoming apparent only at the moment of his birth. The Pharaoh had charged Coptic women to watch over the women of the Children of Israel. That was because what the Children of Israel were saying had reached him; namely, that they were claiming that "a man would be born among us whose name shall be Moses son of ʿImrān. The destruction of the Pharaoh and his people shall take place at his hands."

Thus, due to that, the Pharaoh said: "I shall certainly kill their male offspring till what they hope for and anticipate fails to occur." Consequently, he separated the men and the women, imprisoning the men in the prisons. Thus when Moses' mother gave him birth, she looked at him with grief and sadness, and wept, saying: "He shall be slaughtered this moment." However God made the heart of the Coptic woman entrusted to keep watch over Moses' mother incline favorably towards Moses, and so she said to his mother: "What is the matter with you that the color of your face has grown sallow?"

Moses' mother replied: "I fear for my child, in that he shall be slaughtered," whereupon the Coptic woman said: "Do not fear." This was because Moses was such that everyone who saw him loved him. This is described in *and I cast down upon you love from Me…* (20:39).

Consequently, the Coptic woman entrusted to keep watch over

1 *Nahj al-Balāgha.*

Moses' mother grew to love him. Then God sent down a casket to the mother of Moses and she was called upon to place him in the casket and cast the casket in the river, which was the sea, and [told]: *Do not fear nor grieve; We will bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers* (28:7). So she placed him in the casket and closed it over him and thereafter cast it into the Nile. The Pharaoh had a recreational palace on the shore of the Nile. He looked out from his palace to the black object which the waves of the Nile were raising up while the winds were striking it till they brought it to the gate of the palace of the Pharaoh, and with him was Āsiya his wife. The Pharaoh ordered that the casket be picked up, and so it was picked up and brought up to him. When he opened it, he found therein a baby boy and exclaimed: "This is an Israelite!" However, God cast a powerful love in favor of Moses in the heart of the Pharaoh and likewise in the heart of his wife. Nevertheless, the Pharaoh intended to kill him but Āsiya said: *Do not slay him; maybe he will be useful to us, or we may take him for a son, and they did not perceive* (28:9) that it was Moses.[1]

(5) It is narrated from the Prophet about: *And Pharaoh's wife said: A refreshment of the eye to me and to you; do not slay him* (28:9): I swear by the Being who is sworn by, had the Pharaoh admitted that he [Moses] was a joy for him just as his wife admitted to that, God would have guided him through Moses just as He guided her; however he disdained to do so due to the wretchedness which God had destined for him.[2]

(6) It is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq about *And when he attained his maturity and became full grown* (28:14):
His "attaining maturity" was at eighteen years of age, while "becoming fully grown" means he grew a beard.[3]

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī,* on the authority of my father (that is, al-Qummī's father), on the authority of al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb, on the authority of ʿAlā b. Razīn, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān.*

3 *Al-Maʿānī,* via its chain of transmission on the authority of Muḥammad b. Nuʾmān al-Aḥwāl.

Verses 15-21

This is the second section of the story of Moses (in this sūrah). It contains a description of some of the events that happened after his attaining maturity, which consequently led him to leave Egypt for Midian.

وَدَخَلَ الْمَدِينَةَ عَلَىٰ حِينِ غَفْلَةٍ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا فَوَجَدَ فِيهَا رَجُلَيْنِ يَقْتَتِلَانِ هَٰذَا مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ وَهَٰذَا مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ ۖ فَاسْتَغَاثَهُ الَّذِي مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ عَلَى الَّذِي مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَوَكَزَهُ مُوسَىٰ فَقَضَىٰ عَلَيْهِ ۖ قَالَ هَٰذَا مِنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ ۖ إِنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ مُضِلٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٥﴾

(28:15) ***And he entered the city at a time of invigilance on the part of its people, so he found therein two men fighting, one being of his party and the other of his foes, and he who was of his party cried out to him for help against him who was of his enemies, so Moses struck him with his fist and killed him. He said: This is on account of Satan's doing; he is an enemy, openly leading astray.***

Regarding *And he entered the city at a time of invigilance on the part of its people*, there is no doubt that the city which Moses entered at a time when its inhabitants were not vigilant was a city in Egypt while he used to live with the Pharaoh. It may be deduced from this that the royal palace in which the Pharaoh resided was beyond the city and that Moses came out from it and went into the city at a time when its inhabitants were not vigilant. What confirms and endorses what we have deduced is a verse that we shall encounter shortly, which reads: *And a man came running from the remotest part of the city…* (28:20). This verse will serve as vindication [for our assertion that the Pharaoh's palace was beyond the city or far from its central district].

At a time of invigilance on the part of its people refers to a time when the people retire to their homes and consequently the markets become inactive while the streets and alleyways become deserted of people and passers-by such as at midday and in the middle of the night.

So he found therein two men fighting means that "the two men were

disputing, arguing, and fighting with each other, having had come to blows," while *one being of his party and the other of his foes* (28:15) relates the state which the incident portrays, and its meaning is that one of the two was an Israelite from among the followers of Moses, with respect to his faith. This is because the Children of Israel during those times attributed their religious origin to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, deriving it from them, even though nothing of the faith remained for them save the name, while they used to simulate the worship of the Pharaoh. The other man was a Copt who was Moses' enemy, for the Copts were the enemies of the Children of Israel. Another piece of evidence that attests to the second of the two contending persons being a Copt is the verse that occurs at another place in the Qur'an, where Moses addresses his Lord thus: *And they [the Copts] have a crime against me; therefore, I fear that they may slay me* (26:14).

And he who was of his party cried out to him* (fa istaghāthahu, from istighātha) *for help against him who was of his enemies: The verbal noun *al-istighātha* means "to seek or ask for aid, relief, and succor" and "to call or cry out to someone for help." This means that the Israelite called out to Moses to help him against his enemy the Copt.

***So Moses struck him with his fist* (fa wakazahu, from al-wakz) *and killed* (fa qaḍā) *him*:** The pronoun "him" that occurs twice in this section of the verse refers to "him who was of his enemies." The verbal noun *al-wakz* means "to thrust," "to jab," "to punch," and "to strike with the entirety of the fist" as mentioned by al-Rāghib and others, while the term *al-qaḍā* means "to render judgment" and "to sentence." Thus the construct *al-qaḍāu ʿālayhi* (or as it appears in this verse: *fa qaḍā ʿalayhi*) means "to put an end to the Copt's affair by his death." Therefore the meaning obtained is that Moses shoved the Copt or punched or struck him with the entirety of his fist and consequently the Copt died. This was a case of manslaughter or accidental homicide; that is, a killing that occurred by error and mistake. Had it been otherwise, it would have been more appropriate and worthy of the speech of God to express the deed with the term *al-qatl* ("murder").

The part of this verse which reads *He said: This is on account of [or from] Satan's doing; he is an enemy, openly leading astray* (28:15) refers to what transpired of the fight between the two contenders till it led to the death of the Copt where Moses attributed it to Satan when he said *This is*

on account of [or from] Satan's doing (28:15). The preposition *min* signifies "a class or a type" of thing or something coming into being, originating, or resulting from something. Thus the meaning obtained is that this incident of antagonism and fighting that occurred was a kind or a type of deed attributable to Satan or one which came about or resulted from Satan's instigation, for it was Satan who caused enmity, hostility, and hatred between them and seduced them to fight till it led to the intervention of Moses and the killing of the Copt at his hands. This deed, in turn, placed Moses in grave danger, for he knew that the incident would not remain secret and hidden and that the Copts, their leaders, and their dignitaries would rise against him, and at their head the Pharaoh, would severely retaliate against him and against whoever had a role in that incident.

At that point Moses realized that he had made a mistake in what he had done in terms of striking the Copt, an act which had brought about a difficult and destructive situation upon him. An occurrence of mistake such as this is not attributed to God since He only guides to the truth and to that which is right; thus, Moses consequently determined that what had transpired was attributable to Satan.

His was not a sin or a wrong-doing on his part since it had happened by mistake, and had happened while he was defending and supporting the Israelite, which was a defense against an unjust disbeliever. Still, just as Satan causes the human being to disobey and fall into sin by means of his evil whisperings and insinuations, similarly he causes the human being to fall into everything that is contrary to what is right, due to which the human being suffers trouble and hardship just as Satan caused Adam and his spouse to fall into what he made them fall into, which was partaking from the forbidden tree which consequently led to their dismissal from the garden.

Therefore Moses' statement reported in this verse *This is on account of Satan's doing* (28:15) was in the form of a harsh reproof and a castigation from himself for what had transpired of the violent altercation which subsequently led to the killing of the Copt and to him falling into grave danger, as well as his regret for that. Moses' subsequent statement reported in this verse that says *he is an enemy, openly leading astray* (28:15) is an indication from himself that his deed was due to error, attributable to Satan even if it was not due to disobedience of God which results in sin and punishment. Rather, it was a sheer mistake which could not be ascribed

to God but to Satan who is an enemy, openly leading astray. Hence the deed that ensued from him was a kind of bad planning or a bad move and a mistaken or misplaced effort driving him to a harmful and detrimental consequence. Thus when the Pharaoh remonstrated with him at a later time as reported in: *And you did [that] deed of yours which you did, and you are one of the ungrateful* (26:19), Moses responded by saying: *I did it then while I was of those unable to see the right course* (26:20).[1]

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي فَاغْفِرْ لِي فَغَفَرَ لَهُ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٦﴾

(28:16) *He said: My Lord! Surely I have done harm to myself, so do Thou forgive me. So He forgave him; He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.*

The part of the verse which reads *He said: My Lord! Surely I have done harm to myself, so do Thou forgive me. So He forgave him; He is the Forgiving, the Merciful* serves as an acknowledgment from Moses to his Lord that he had wronged himself, in the sense that the deed had led him to a situation of danger, casting him into jeopardy. From this it becomes clear that the intent of the forgiveness asked by Moses in *so do thou forgive me* (28:16) means a request for the nullification of the negative consequence of his deed, and his deliverance from grief and sorrow as well as his deliverance from the evil of the Pharaoh and his people. This meaning also comes to the fore in: *And you killed a man, then We delivered you from grief* (*wa qatalta nafsan fa najjaynāka min al-ghamm*). (20:40)

This admission of the wrong and the plea for forgiveness by Moses is similar to what transpired from Adam and his spouse, which is narrated in: *They said: Our Lord! We have been unjust to ourselves, and if Thou forgive us not, and have [not] mercy on us, we shall certainly be of the losers* (7:23)

قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَا أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ فَلَنْ أَكُونَ ظَهِيرًا لِلْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

(28:17) *He said: My Lord! Because Thou hast bestowed a favor on me, I shall never be a backer of the guilty ones.*

With respect to *He said: My Lord! Because Thou hast bestowed a favor on me, I shall never be a backer of the guilty ones,* it has been suggested that the letter *bāʾ* in the phrase *bimā anʿamta* ("because thou hast bestowed

1 See volume 30, pp. 20ff of the English translation, under verses 26:19-21. (Ed.)

a favor") serves to indicate causality or the reason for an action (*bāʾ al-sababiyya*). Thus the meaning obtained is: "My Lord, *because of* (*or due to*) what You have favored me with, it is incumbent on me *due to or because of Your obligation* (*on me*) that I shall not be a helper of the guilty ones." Thus it was a promise from him to God. It is also suggested that the letter *bāʾ* serves as the particle of oath while the predicate of the oath is elided. Hence the meaning obtained is: "I swear by what You have favored me with, I shall certainly turn to You in repentance or that I shall certainly desist and consequently I shall never be a backer of the guilty ones." It is also suggested that it serves as a particle of oath that specifically denotes a conciliatory entreaty or a plea that seeks compassion and sympathy, which is an oath that occurs in rhetorical composition such as the imploring oath *billāhi zurnī* ("I plead with you in the name of God, visit me"). In this case, the meaning of the verse under discussion becomes: "I adjure You to be compassionate towards me and to protect me, and that I shall never be a helper of the guilty ones."

However the first interpretation is the best since the intent of *because Thou hast bestowed a favor on me* is in line with what they have mentioned. As for the bestowal of favors on him by God, it refers to God's protection of him and saving him from being killed by the Pharaoh and God's returning him to his mother. It also refers to God accepting his penitence for killing the Copt and forgiving him. This is understood on the basis that Moses learned of God's forgiveness of himself by means of inspiration or a dream or by means of a medium similar to these. Nevertheless and however it may be, [if the latter two explanations are considered for the letter *bāʾ*, which suggest an oath], it is an oath in the name of other than God. Hence the meaning obtained is: "My Lord, I swear by Your protection of me" or "I swear by Your pardoning me." However, an oath of this kind, where the oath taker is other than God and where the subject of the oath is other than God, does not occur elsewhere in the Qur'an.

As for *I shall never be a backer of the guilty ones* (mujrimīn), it has been suggested that the term *mujrimīn* ("guilty ones") is a reference to those who cause others to fall into a crime, or it is a reference to persons, helping whom leads to a crime such as the Israelite whom the Copt provoked and consequently aiding him caused Moses to commit a crime of manslaughter. Thus the term *mujrimīn* ("guilty ones") serves as a figurative attribution where one being causes another being to fall into a crime and is

figuratively called "the guilty one." However, it is also suggested that those meant by the term "guilty ones" are the Pharaoh and his people. Thus the meaning would be: "I swear by Your favors on me, I shall certainly turn to You in penitence and shall never be a helper of the Pharaoh and his people by associating with them and keeping their company or by augmenting their numbers as I used to till now." This second interpretation has been rejected by some on the grounds that it does not suit the context; however, the truth of the matter is that the verse which reads: *My Lord! Because Thou hast bestowed a favor on me, I shall never be a backer of the guilty ones* is a promise by Moses in that he would not aid a guilty person in his crime due to his gratitude towards God on account of the favors He had bestowed on him. The term "favor" (*al-niʿmah*) in this verse refers to divine leadership (*al-wilāyah al-ilāhiyya*). Such an understanding of the term "favor" is because the term has been applied to divine leadership (in the Qur'an). An example is the following verse that attests to such an application: *And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, these are with those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors* (fa ulāʾika maʿa alladhīna anʿam Allāhu ʿalayhim) *from among the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the good, and a goodly company are they* (4:69).

These people are the people of the straight path who are safe from deviation and the wrath of God as is attested in: *Keep us on the right path; the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors* (ṣirāṭ alladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim). *Not [the path] of those upon whom Thy wrath is brought down, nor of those who go astray*. (1:6-7)

The necessary consequence of abstaining from aiding the guilty due to the bestowal of favors in this sense is unambiguously apparent and clear.

Consequently, it becomes clear that the ones meant by the term *mujrimīn* ("guilty ones") are the likes of the Pharaoh and his people rather than the likes of the Israelite whom Moses helped. This is because helping the Israelite did not constitute a crime nor was striking the Copt a crime that Moses would repent for. How could that be? For Moses was from the people of the straight path. The people of the straight path do not go astray by disobeying God, and God has emphasized Moses' status as being from the "purified ones"—those towards whom Satan has no recourse such that he may seduce, tempt, and lead them astray, as is attested in the following verse *And mention Moses in the Book; he was one purified, and he was a messenger, a prophet* (19:51). This is in addition to what God has

emphasized previously in this sūrah, that He had granted Moses wisdom and knowledge and that he was among the good-doers and the pious. A person of such caliber does not let partisan bigotry provoke, incite or induce him to the point that he gets inappropriately angry or helps a criminal in his crime.

The (third person singular perfect tense) verb *qāla* ("He said") recurs thrice (in these verses under discussion): *He said: This is on account of Satan's doing…* (28:15); *He said: My Lord! Surely I have done harm to myself…* (28:16); *He said: My Lord! Because Thou hast bestowed a favor on me…* (28:17).

This recurrence of the verb is due to the different contexts in these three sentences where the first denotes Moses' judgment, the second denotes Moses' repentance and supplication, and the third denotes Moses' promise and determined commitment.

فَأَصْبَحَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ خَائِفًا يَتَرَقَّبُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي اسْتَنْصَرَهُ بِالْأَمْسِ
يَسْتَصْرِخُهُ ۚ قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَىٰ إِنَّكَ لَغَوِيٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٨﴾

(28:18) ***Next morning, he was in the city, fearful and vigilant, when behold, the one who had sought his help the day before shouted for his help [once again]*** **(yastaṣrikhuhu, from al-istiṣrākh).** ***Moses said to him: You are indeed manifestly errant*** **(ghawī, from al-ghiwāyah)!**

The qualification of the phrase *fa-aṣbaḥa* in this verse ("next morning, he was") by *fī al-madīnah* ("in the city") proves that he remained in the city till the next day and did not return to the palace of the Pharaoh, while the verbal noun *al-istiṣrākh* means "to call for help with a raised voice," similar to shouting out or crying out loud. *Al-ghiwāyah* means "erroneous," "to deviate from or to fall short of rightness or correctness," "to go completely astray," "the state of being contrary to right guidance."

Thus the meaning obtained is that Moses became fearful of the Pharaoh, awaiting and anticipating his evil reprisal whilst still in the city, not having had returned to the royal palace, when suddenly he was taken by surprise in that the Israelite who had sought his help against the Copt the other day was calling him for help with a raised voice against yet another Copt, which is when Moses said to him in censure and reproof: *You are indeed manifestly errant!*, meaning "you do not follow the path

of reason, wisdom, and rightness." This was because he was provoking and fighting a people, antagonizing and fighting whom would result in nothing save certain evil.

فَلَمَّا أَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يَبْطِشَ بِالَّذِي هُوَ عَدُوٌّ لَهُمَا قَالَ يَا مُوسَىٰ أَتُرِيدُ أَنْ تَقْتُلَنِي كَمَا قَتَلْتَ نَفْسًا بِالْأَمْسِ ۖ إِنْ تُرِيدُ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ جَبَّارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا تُرِيدُ أَنْ تَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُصْلِحِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

(28:19) ***But when he wanted to strike him who was an enemy to them both, he said: Moses, do you want to kill me as you killed a person yesterday? You just want to be a tyrant in the land, and you do not desire to be of those who bring about reform.***

Prominent scholars have said that the pronoun "he" inherent to the verb *qāla* ("he said") refers to the Israelite who was crying out to Moses, and that is because the Israelite thought that Moses wanted to strike him when he heard his reprimand in the statement: *You are indeed manifestly errant!* (28:18) Thus when he realized Moses' intent to strike him, it frightened and horrified him, whereupon *he said: Moses, do you want to kill me as you killed a person yesterday? You just want to be a tyrant in the land, and you do not desire to be of those who bring about reform.* At this point, the Copt realized that Moses was the person who had killed the other Copt the day before and so he returned to the Pharaoh and informed him of the news, whereupon the Pharaoh and his people conferred together to deliberate upon Moses and subsequently resolved to kill him.

What these scholars have suggested as interpretation is due to the testimony of the context in its favor and therefore what is suggested contrary to it—such as that the pronoun "he" refers to the Copt rather than to the Israelite—is inconsequential, while the meaning of the rest of the verse is manifestly clear.

But when he wanted to strike him who was an enemy to them both… serves as a critical allusion to what exists in the current Torah, since the latter says that the two contenders were both Israelites, while the statement in this verse that says *Moses! Do you want to…?* confirms that the one uttering these words is the Israelite rather than the Copt since the context is that of blame, reproach, and complaint.

وَجَاءَ رَجُلٌ مِنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ يَسْعَىٰ قَالَ يَا مُوسَىٰ إِنَّ الْمَلَأَ يَأْتَمِرُونَ بِكَ لِيَقْتُلُوكَ فَاخْرُجْ إِنِّي لَكَ مِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(28:20) ***And a man came running from the remotest part of the city. He said: O Moses! Surely the chiefs are consulting together* (ya'tamirūna, from al-i'timār)** ***to slay you, therefore depart [at once]; I am of those who wish well to you.***

The verbal noun *al-i'timār* means: "to consult," "to confer," "to counsel," "to advise and recommend," thus being contrary to treachery and betrayal.

It is clear that the part of this verse that reads *from the remotest part of the city* qualifies the verb *jā'a* ("he came") which occurs in this verse. Thus the context of the narrative suggests that the consultation was taking place with the Pharaoh and due to his instruction and orders while this man came from there and that the palace of the Pharaoh was situated in the remotest part of the city and therefore lay beyond it. So the man informs Moses that he might be killed and suggested that he leave the city. This inference or understanding from this verse under discussion supports what was previously suggested that the palace of the Pharaoh in which he resided lay beyond the city, and the meaning of the verse is clear.

فَخَرَجَ مِنْهَا خَائِفًا يَتَرَقَّبُ ۖ قَالَ رَبِّ نَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢١﴾

(28:21) ***So he left the city, fearful and vigilant, [and] he said: My Lord! Deliver me from the unjust people.***

This verse contains evidence in support of the idea that Moses did not consider his killing of the Copt as a crime.

Examining Narrations

(1) ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī relates:

Moses continued to live with the Pharaoh in the best of dignity and honor [that is, in the best of states] till he reached adulthood. The Pharaoh used to negate and deny what Moses used to say about monotheism till the Pharaoh became concerned and planned to do away with him. Consequently, Moses left the [palace of the] Pharaoh and entered the city where he came across two people fighting. One of them professed what Moses professed

while the other professed what the Pharaoh professed. Thus the one who was from Moses' partisans called out to him for help, and so Moses went over and struck the Pharaoh's partisan with his fist and killed him, and then hid in the city. When the next day dawned, another one [of the Pharaoh's partisans] came and took hold of the man who professed what Moses professed, refusing to let him go whereupon he [Moses' partisan] called out to Moses for help again. When the other contender saw Moses, he said to him: *Do you intend to kill me as you killed a person yesterday?* (28:19) Thereafter he let go of him and fled.[1]

(2) It is narrated from ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Jahm:

I once attended the gathering of al-Maʾmūn while Imam al-Riḍā was with him there. Al-Maʾmūn said to the Imam: "Son of the Messenger, do you not hold that the prophets are infallible?" He replied in the affirmative, whereupon al-Maʾmūn said: "Then explain to me *so Moses struck him with his fist and killed him. He said: This is on account of Satan's doing; he is an enemy, openly leading astray* (28:15)."

Imam al-Riḍā replied: "Moses entered one of the Pharaoh's cities *at a time of invigilance on the part of its people* (28:15), and that time was between sunset (*al-maghrib*) and night-time (*al-ʿishā*). There *he found two men fighting, one being of his party and the other of his foes* (28:15). Thus he sentenced the foe according to the judgment of God and struck him with his fist; consequently, the foe died. *He said*: *This is on account of Satan's doing* (28:15). This refers to the fighting that occurred between the two men and not to what Moses had done with respect to killing the foe. *Surely he is an enemy, openly leading astray* (28:15)."

Al-Maʾmūn asked: "Then what is the meaning of Moses' statement: *My Lord! Surely I have done harm to myself so do Thou forgive me* (28:16)?"

The Imam replied: "He meant: I placed myself in a situation that was inappropriate for me to be in by entering this city, *so do Thou forgive me* (28:16), meaning: conceal me from Your enemies so that they may not seize me for then they would kill me. As a

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī.*

result, God protected him; *He is the Forgiving, the Merciful* (28:16). Moses said: *My Lord! Because Thou hast bestowed a favor on me* (28:17) which favor is that of strength such that I killed a man with a single blow, *I shall never be a backer of the guilty ones* (28:17); rather I shall strive against them with this strength till You are pleased. *And* Moses found himself in the city, *fearful and vigilant, when behold, the one who had sought his help the day before, shouted for his help [once again].* (28:18). *Moses said to him: You are indeed manifestly errant!* (28:18). You fought a man yesterday and are fighting another today! I shall certainly teach you a lesson. And he meant to seize him. But when he intended to seize the one who was an enemy to them both, which in this case was his partisan, the latter said: *Moses, do you want to kill me as you killed a person yesterday? You just want to be a tyrant in the land, and you do not desire to be of those who bring about reform* (28:19)." At this al-Maʾmūn said: "May God reward you well on behalf of his prophets, O Abū al-Ḥasan!"[1]

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1 *Al-ʿUyūn,* via its chain of transmission.

Verses 22-28

This is the third section of the story of Moses in this sūrah. This section describes his departure from Egypt towards Midian subsequent to his killing the Copt, and in fear of the Pharaoh, as well as his marriage there with a daughter of a great, elderly man who is not mentioned by name in the Qur'an; however the transmitted reports of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt and some of the transmitted reports in the corpus of Sunni traditions mention that he was the prophet Shuʿayb sent to the people of Midian.

وَلَمَّا تَوَجَّهَ تِلْقَاءَ مَدْيَنَ قَالَ عَسَىٰ رَبِّي أَنْ يَهْدِيَنِي سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ ﴿٢٢﴾

(28:22) ***And when he turned his face towards Midian, he said: Maybe my Lord will guide me to the right path.***

Majmaʿ al-Bayān defines the word *tilqāʾa* by saying:

> The phrase *tilqāʾu al-shay* means "facing something," "something being opposite to something else," or "face to face with something."[1] In Arabic, *faʿala dhālika min tilqāʾi nafsihi* means "he carried out that deed of his own accord," that is, from the direction of his own self or from his own self or due to the suggestion of his own self. The phrase *sawāʾa al-sabīl* that occurs in this verse means "the middle path" or "the median path."

As for Midian, it was a city of the people of Shuʿayb in the direction of Tabūk. It was located on the Red Sea and separated from Tabūk in distance by six stages. This is according to *Marāṣid al-Iṭṭilāʿ*.

It was a place bigger than Tabūk where there existed a well from which Moses drew water for Shuʿayb's sheep.

It is also suggested that the distance between these two places [that is, Tabūk or Midian on the one hand] and Egypt [on the other] was that of eight nights and that Midian lay beyond the dominion of the Pharaoh, which was the reason Moses headed for it.

Thus the meaning obtained for this verse is that when Moses turned

1 Thus it has the meaning of "a specific direction or facing a specific direction." (Trans.)

his face in the direction of, or towards Midian, on leaving Egypt, he uttered the following words of prayer: "I hope and pray to my Lord that He will guide me to the median path so that I will not lose my way by deviating from it and leaving it for another path." Hence the context, as you can observe, suggests that Moses intended to go towards Midian, although he did not know the road leading to it and therefore he prayed to God and anticipated God would guide him.

وَلَمَّا وَرَدَ مَاءَ مَدْيَنَ وَجَدَ عَلَيْهِ أُمَّةً مِنَ النَّاسِ يَسْقُونَ وَوَجَدَ مِنْ
دُونِهِمُ امْرَأَتَيْنِ تَذُودَانِ ۖ قَالَ مَا خَطْبُكُمَا ۖ قَالَتَا لَا نَسْقِي حَتَّىٰ يُصْدِرَ
الرِّعَاءُ ۖ وَأَبُونَا شَيْخٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

(28:23) ***And when he came to the water of Midian, he found at it a group of men watering, and he found besides them two women keeping back [their flocks]*** **(tadhūdāni, from al-dhawd).** ***He said: What is the matter with you? They said: We cannot water until the shepherds take away [their sheep] from the water, and our father is a very old man.***

The noun *al-dhawd* means: "to restrain," "to bar," "to keep off or away or back." Hence the meaning of *two women keeping back [their flocks]* is that "the two women were preventing their sheep from going to the water or from mixing with the sheep of the people," just as the meaning of *a group of men watering* means "the men were watering or giving their sheep and livestock water to drink." As for the term *al-riʿāʾu* that occurs in this verse, it is the plural of *al-rāʿiy*, which refers to the one who looks after or guards or watches over sheep and livestock—that is, a shepherd.

Thus the meaning obtained for this verse is that when Moses arrived at the watering place of Midian, he found there a group of men watering their sheep and close by but at a distance, he found two women restraining and keeping back their sheep from going to the watering place, whereupon he inquired from them when he found them thus, that is, in a state where they were keeping back their sheep while he did not see any man with their sheep: "What do you want here? What is your business here?" and they replied: "We wish to water our sheep but we do not water our sheep"—meaning, that is our norm and custom—"till the male shepherds leave after watering their sheep and drive them away from the watering

place. This is because our father is an elderly man unable to personally undertake the chore of watering the sheep and hence we have taken over the responsibility."

فَسَقَىٰ لَهُمَا ثُمَّ تَوَلَّىٰ إِلَى الظِّلِّ فَقَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي لِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ إِلَيَّ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَقِيرٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

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(28:24) ***So he watered [their sheep] for them, then went back to the shade and said: My Lord! Surely I stand in need of the good Thou hast sent down to me.***

Thus Moses understood from their speech that the reason for their holding back and delaying watering their sheep was due to a kind of chastity, modesty, and veiling on their part, as well as a sort of encroachment and infringement of their rights by the men. Consequently, he took the initiative and watered their sheep for them.

Then went back to the shade and said: My Lord! Surely I stand in need of the good Thou hast sent down to me means he moved off to the shade in order to rest there, for the heat was intense, which is when he uttered these words of prayer. The majority of the commentators have interpreted and understood this speech—*My Lord! Surely I stand in need of the good Thou hast sent down to me*—as referring to his wish and prayer for food by which he could assuage his hunger. Hence it would be more fitting that the meaning of Moses' statement *of the good Thou hast sent down to me* refers to or implies "bodily strength" by which he used to perform good deeds which qualified for God's satisfaction and pleasure such as defending the Israelite, fleeing towards Midian and away from the Pharaoh, and watering the sheep of Shuʿayb.[1] Thus, Moses' manifesting his need for this strength and power which God had favored him with from Himself with such lavish abundance carries the sense of manifesting his need for some sustenance by which this strength and power that had been bestowed and

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1 The letter *lām* that occurs as pre-fixed to the particle *mā* carries the sense of the preposition *ilā* ("to" or "towards"). (Auth.)
Thus this part of the verse is suggested to be understood as saying: "My Lord, *to* the good You have sent down to me—which is bodily strength, which You have favored me with—is what I stand in need of." That is, "I stand in need of bodily strength which You have favored me with." (Trans.)

granted him could be retained and augmented.

It appears that Moses was a person who kept a strict watch over his deeds and would not do a thing or intend a thing, even if his human nature desired it, save that which involved seeking the pleasure and satisfaction of God and striving in that regard. This is evident on carefully contemplating the foregoing narrative. Thus he uttered the following words when he struck the Copt with his entire fist: *He said: My Lord! Because Thou hast bestowed a favor on me, I shall never be a backer of the guilty* (28:17). Then he uttered the following words of prayer when he left Egypt, in fear and dread of the Pharaoh's reprisal: *My Lord! Deliver me from the unjust people* (28:21). Thereafter he uttered the following words when he undertook the journey towards Midian: *Maybe my Lord will guide me to the right path* (28:22). Then he uttered these words when he had watered the sheep and moved off towards the shade: *My Lord! Surely I stand in need of the good Thou hast sent down to me* (28:24). Finally, he said the following words when he hired out himself to Shuʿayb and married his daughter: *And Allah is a witness of what we say* (28:28).

However, what is reported from some of the commentators with respect to the letter *lām* [prefixed to the particle *mā*] which is that it serves to indicate purpose and objective[1] is far from correct and falls short of what the context suggests. Likewise is what some of the commentators have said in interpretation of the word *khayr* (translated as: "good"), which occurs in this verse, to mean "the good of religion," which refers to being rescued from the tyrannical, is far from correct and falls short of what the context suggests.

فَجَاءَتْهُ إِحْدَاهُمَا تَمْشِي عَلَى اسْتِحْيَاءٍ قَالَتْ إِنَّ أَبِي يَدْعُوكَ لِيَجْزِيَكَ
أَجْرَ مَا سَقَيْتَ لَنَا ۚ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُ وَقَصَّ عَلَيْهِ الْقَصَصَ قَالَ لَا تَخَفْ ۖ
نَجَوْتَ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(28:25) ***Then one of the two women came to him walking bashfully. She said: My father invites you that he may give you the reward of***

1 That is known as *lām al-taʿlīl* and has the meaning of "for the sake of." That would render the verse as: "My Lord, *for the sake of* the good You have sent down to me—which is bodily strength, which You have bestowed me with—is what I stand in need of." (Trans.)

your having watered for us. So when he came to him and gave him the account, he said: Fear not, you are secure from the unjust people.

The dual pronoun *humā* refers to the two women, while the occurrence of the verbal noun *istiḥyāʾ* ("bashfully") in an indefinite form is for the sake of emphasis and honor. The intent of describing her walking style as one that was done bashfully is in order to express and highlight the virtue of chastity demonstrated by her walking style.[1] As for *So when he came to him and gave him the account, he said: Fear not, you are secure from the unjust people,* it suggests that Shuʿayb asked him about his situation whereupon Moses narrated to him his ordeal and consequently Shuʿayb attempted to raise his spirits and cheer him up by assuring him that he had escaped the Pharaoh and his people since the Pharaoh and his people had no power or dominion over Midian.

With this, God's response to Moses' three invocations became complete. This is because Moses had asked God, at the moment of his fleeing Egypt, that He rescue him from the unjust people and so Shuʿayb informed him of his deliverance. Moses had also requested God to guide him to a median path, which was in the meaning of an invocation, and consequently, he arrived at Midian. Finally, he had asked God for sustenance, and Shuʿayb called him in order to reward or recompense him for helping his daughters water his sheep. In addition to all the above, God increased His favors on him in that He sufficed him by providing him sustenance for ten years and gifted him a spouse with whom he lived and with whom he found peace and tranquility.

قَالَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا يَا أَبَتِ اسْتَأْجِرْهُ ۖ إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَنِ اسْتَأْجَرْتَ الْقَوِيُّ الْأَمِينُ ﴿٢٦﴾

(28:26) ***Said one of them: O my father! Employ him*** **(istaʾjirhu),** ***the best of those that you can employ is the strong man, the faithful one.***

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1 In *that he may give you the reward of your having watered for us…* (28:25), the particle *mā* is identified as *mā maṣdariyya* (gerundival *mā*). (Auth.)
The gerundival *mā* has the grammatical effect of rendering the perfect or imperfect verb following it into the meaning of a verbal noun. Hence the sentence is supposed to be read and understood as follows: *li yajziyaka ajra saqyika lanā*—"that he may give you the reward of your watering the animals for us." (Trans.)

The choice of the verbal noun *istījār* here suggests that the intent was of employing Moses for the generality of Shuʿayb's needs and requirements—needs and requirements which would demand the attention of whoever would occupy that role even if the responsibility on the basis of the context was merely watching over sheep. This is while *the best of those that you can employ is the strong man, the faithful one* occurs in the sense of explaining the purpose and justification (*al-taʿlīl*) for the imperative verb *istaʾjir* ("employing"). The latter part of this verse is an example of citing the cause [that is, a reference to a strong and faithful man] in place of the effect [that is, strength and reliability or trustworthiness]. Hence the implication is: "Employ Moses *because* he is strong and faithful, for the best of those that you can employ is the strong, faithful man."

As for the daughter's judgment that Moses was strong and faithful, it connotes that she had witnessed his efforts at watering the sheep which proved his character to her and from which she deduced his strength. Similarly, the manifestation of his chastity and modesty during his conversation with them both and while watering their sheep, and the manner in which he behaved in her company when he accompanied her to Shuʿayb till he reached the latter's presence, proved his character to her; from it, she concluded that he was reliable and trustworthy. This also proves that the daughter who uttered these words: *O my father! Employ him…* (28:26) is the same one who came over to Moses and informed him of her father's invitation to him. This is also transmitted in the reports of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt as well as being the preferred understanding of a multitude of commentators.

قَالَ إِنِّي أُرِيدُ أَنْ أُنْكِحَكَ إِحْدَى ابْنَتَيَّ هَاتَيْنِ عَلَىٰ أَنْ تَأْجُرَنِي ثَمَانِيَ حِجَجٍ ۖ فَإِنْ أَتْمَمْتَ عَشْرًا فَمِنْ عِنْدِكَ ۖ وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَشُقَّ عَلَيْكَ ۚ سَتَجِدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(28:27) ***He said: I desire to marry one of these two daughters of mine to you on condition that you should serve me for eight years; but if you complete ten, it will be of your own free will, and I do not wish to be hard on you; if Allah pleases, you will find me one of the good.***

This speech represents Shuʿayb's proposal to Moses to hire himself out

to him for eight or ten years in exchange for Shuʿayb's marrying one of his daughters to him. This proposal of Shuʿayb which is contained in this verse does not denote a definitive marriage contract and the evidence for that is the absence of the specification of the daughter to be given away in marriage to Moses in Shuʿayb's speech. Shuʿayb's statement *one of these two daughters of mine* serves as evidence that both of them were present at that time and in that place. Shuʿayb's statement in this verse *on condition that you should serve me for eight years* means "on the condition that you hire yourself out to me"—meaning that he should serve him as an employee—"for eight years," where the term *al-ḥijaj* ("years") that occurs in this verse is the plural of the word *ḥijjatun*. The word *ḥijjatun* means "a year" on the basis that every year there comes about an opportunity for the people to perform a pilgrimage (*ḥijjatun*) to the Sacred House of God. From this, it becomes clear that the pilgrimage to the House of God—which is part of the law code (*sharīʿah*) of Abraham—was practiced by them too.

Shuʿayb's statement *but if you complete ten, it will be of your own free will* means: "If you complete ten years of service, that decision will be from yourself and due to your own free choice without your being coerced by me," while Shuʿayb's statement *and I do not wish to be hard on you* serves as information on the type of service he intends from him, which is that it will be an employment not characterized by hardship and toil, meaning that Shuʿayb would be a virtuous employer. Shuʿayb's statement *if Allah pleases, you will find me one of the good* means: "I am from the good and virtuous people, and you will find me from among them if God wishes and pleases." Thus the phrase "if God pleases" that occurs here relates to Shuʿayb's hope that Moses would find Shuʿayb to be from among the good and virtuous people, and not that Shuʿayb would realize himself to be from among them.

قَالَ ذَٰلِكَ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ ۖ أَيَّمَا الْأَجَلَيْنِ قَضَيْتُ فَلَا عُدْوَانَ عَلَيَّ ۖ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَا نَقُولُ وَكِيلٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

(28:28) ***He said: This shall be [an agreement] between me and you; whichever of the two terms I fulfil, there shall be no wrongdoing on me; and Allah is a guardian-witness of what we say.***

The pronoun "he" refers to Moses. As for Moses' statement, *This shall*

be [an agreement] between me and you, he meant: "What you suggested and determined of the arrangement and agreement and which you proposed to me is confirmed between us. None of us shall infringe what we have agreed upon mutually." Moses' statement in *whichever of the two terms I fulfil, there shall be no wrongdoing on me* serves as a clarification of the two choices of time suggested in Shuʿayb's statement, which statement was *eight years; but if you complete ten, it will be of your own free will* (28:27). Moses meant to clarify: now it rests on me to choose whichever of the two terms I wish. Therefore, if I choose eight years, then it is not on you to infringe my right and to compel me for more, and if I choose the latter term and serve you for ten years then it is not for you to infringe on my right and prohibit me from serving you the additional term.

Moses' concluding statement in this verse says *and Allah is a guardian-witness of what we say*. His entrusting God as a guardian and as protector for what they had arranged and agreed upon included his calling God to attest to what they had agreed, as well as including the right to refer any potential dispute and the judgment thereof to Him if they ever disagreed. It is for this reason that he chose to entrust God as a guardian and as a protector, putting God in charge of the affair, choosing and preferring that in addition to calling for His attestation since testimony and judgment both belong to God. This is similar to Jacob's statement when he took a covenant from his sons to return to him his son described by God in: *And when they gave him their covenant, he said: Allah is a guardian-witness for what we say* (falammā atawhu mawthiqahum qāla Allāhu ʿalā mā naqūlu wakīl, 12:66).

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Ṣādiq said the following in an extended discussion regarding *and a man came running from the farthest part of the city…he said: O Moses! Surely the chiefs are consulting together to slay you, therefore depart [at once]; I am of those who wish well to you. So he went forth therefrom, fearing, awaiting…* (28:20-21): This means that he left Egypt without a riding animal or a servant, the land at times pulling him down [into valleys and low lands] and at others raising him up [over hills and high lands] till he arrived at the land of Midian, where he arrived at the bottom of a tree to which he descended. There he found a well, whereat

he found a group of people watering their animals, and there he also found two frail and powerless girls accompanied with their sheep. He asked them: "What do you want here?"

They replied: "Our father is an old and feeble man while we are two powerless girls unable to vie with the men [to water our animals at the same time as they do]. Thus when the men have finished watering their animals, we water ours."

Consequently, Moses felt compassion for them and took their bucket, saying: "Bring forth your sheep," and watered their sheep for them. As a result, they returned home early before the men did. Then Moses turned away and betook himself to the tree and sat down under it, saying *My Lord! Surely I stand in need of whatever good Thou hast sent down to me* (28:24). It is narrated that he uttered these words at a time when he was in need of half a date.

When they returned to their father, he asked: "What has made you return so early at this time?"

They replied: "We came across a virtuous man who took pity on us and watered our animals for us."

So he said to one of them: "Go and call him to me," and so one of them went to him, walking bashfully. *She said: My father invites you that he may give you the reward of your having watered [our animals] for us* (28:25).

It is narrated that Moses said to her: "Point out to me the path and walk behind me, for we, the children of Jacob, do not look at the back sides of women." When he reached Shuʿayb and narrated to him his ordeal, *he said: Fear not, you are secure from the unjust people* (28:25). *He said: I desire to marry one of these two daughters of mine to you on condition that you should serve me for eight years; but if you complete ten, it will be of your own free will* (28:27). Thus it is narrated that Moses served Shuʿayb for the longer of the two terms, and that is because the prophets only undertake what is favorable, gracious, and complete.[1]

Author's comment: Al-Qummī has transmitted content in his commentary which is similar to the above in meaning.

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq commented as follows with respect to the verse

1 *Kamāl al-Dīn*, via its chain of narration on the authority of Sudayr al-Ṣayrafi.

that relates the following about Moses: *My Lord! Surely I stand in need of whatever good Thou hast sent down to me* (28:24).
He asked for food.[1]

Author's comment: Al-ʿAyyāshī has transmitted a report similar to the one above, related from Ḥafṣ from the Imam. In this report, the words attributed to the Imam as commentary for this verse are: "What he meant was food." A similar report has been transmitted by al-ʿAyyāshī from Layth from Imam al-Bāqir, while content similar to the one above has been reported in *Nahj al-Balāgha* where his words are: "By God, he [that is, Moses] did not ask save for bread which he could eat."

(3) The Messenger of God: "When Moses had watered the animals for the two girls, he turned to the shade and said *My Lord! Surely I stand in need of whatever good Thou hast sent down to me* (28:24). He said: "On that day he was in need of a handful of dates."[2]

(4) ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī relates:
Said one of them: O my father! Employ him, the best of those that you can employ is the strong man, the faithful one (28:26). At this, Shuʿayb asked her: "As for his strength, you have apprised me of it in that he single-handedly drew water by means of the bucket; however, how did you learn of his trustworthiness?"
She replied: "That was when he said to me: Walk behind me and point out to me the path, for we are from a people who do not look at the posteriors of women. That is when I learnt that he was not of those who looked at the backsides of women, and this is proof of his trustworthiness."[3]

Author's comment: A similar report has been transmitted in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* from Imam ʿAlī.

(5) It is narrated:
Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked: "Which of the two daughters of Shuʿayb said: *My father invites you that he may give you the reward of your having watered for us* (28:25)?"

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1 *Al-Kāfi,* on the authority of ʿAli b. Ibrāhīm, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of one who narrated it to him.

2 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr,* on the authority of Ibn al-Mardawayh, from Anas b. Mālik.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī.*

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The Imam replied: "The one whom Moses married."
He was asked: "Which of the two terms did he serve?"
The Imam replied: "The more complete and longer one, which was ten years."
He was asked: "Did he consummate the marriage with her before or after the expiry and fulfilment of the entire condition?"
The Imam replied: "He consummated the marriage before the expiry of the condition."
He was asked: "So if a man marries a woman and contracts a term of employment with her father for two months, would that be allowed?"
The Imam replied: "Moses knew that he would complete and fulfil the condition for him (for Shuʿayb)."
He was asked: "How?"
The Imam replied: "He knew that he would stay till he had honored the entirety of the condition."[1]

Author's comment: The fulfilment of ten years has also been reported in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, transmitted from the Prophet by means of several chains.

(6) It is narrated: Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about the House of God: "Was it visited in pilgrimage before the Prophet was commissioned to the office of prophethood?"
He replied in the affirmative and added: "Attestation in its favor is found in the Qur'an, in the speech of Shuʿayb when he said to Moses when the latter married: *He said: …that you should serve me for eight years* (thamāniya ḥijajin)… (28:27) Thus he used the term *ḥijaj* (lit. "pilgrimage years") rather than the term *sinīn* ("years")."[2]

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1 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd, on the authority of Ṣafwān b. Yaḥya.

2 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of al-Ḥalabi.

Verses 29-42

This set of verses contains yet another section of the story of Moses. It contains a summary of the events relating to Moses which occurred from the time he began his journey from Midian towards Egypt, accompanied by his family. It also includes mention of him being sent to the Pharaoh and his people as a divinely ordained messenger in order to rescue the Children of Israel as well as the account of the Pharaoh and his people belying him, up until God drowned them in the sea. This section then terminates with the mention of Moses being given the Book, giving the sense that it is the mainstay of this episode.

فَلَمَّا قَضَىٰ مُوسَى الْأَجَلَ وَسَارَ بِأَهْلِهِ آنَسَ مِنْ جَانِبِ الطُّورِ نَارًا قَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ امْكُثُوا إِنِّي آنَسْتُ نَارًا لَعَلِّي آتِيكُمْ مِنْهَا بِخَبَرٍ أَوْ جَذْوَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَصْطَلُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(28:29) ***So when Moses had fulfilled the term, and he journeyed with his family, he perceived on the side of the mountain a fire. He said to his family: Wait, I have seen a fire, maybe I will bring to you from it some news or a brand of fire, so that you may warm yourselves.***

The beginning part of this verse, which reads *So when Moses had fulfilled the term* means his completing his term of service with Shuʿayb. It is transmitted that he spent the longer of the two terms. The verbal noun *al-īnās* means "vision," "sight," "view," "perception" while the phrase *jadhwatun min al-nār* ("a brand of fire") which occurs in this verse means "a bit of the fire" or "a piece of the fire." The verbal noun *al-iṣṭilāʾ* means "to warm oneself."

The context attests that the anecdote described in this verse occurred during a bitterly cold night when they had lost their way. At that point in time, Moses saw a fire on the side of the mountain which they had come close to. Thus he instructed his family to tarry so that he may go towards what he saw, for perhaps he would find someone there who would inform

him of the right path or he may take a piece of the fire so that they could all warm themselves with it. In Sūrah al-Ṭāhā where the story of Moses is related, there occurs in place of this verse the following verse: *When he saw fire, he said to his family: Stop, for I see a fire, haply I may bring to you therefrom a live coal or find guidance at the fire* (20:10). This is most indicative of them having had lost their way. Similarly, Moses' usage of the plural imperative verb *umkuthū* ("wait all of you") when addressing his family testifies that there were, along with his wife, others with whom such a plural address was valid and appropriate.[1]

فَلَمَّا أَتَاهَا نُودِيَ مِنْ شَاطِئِ الْوَادِ الْأَيْمَنِ فِي الْبُقْعَةِ الْمُبَارَكَةِ مِنَ الشَّجَرَةِ أَنْ يَا مُوسَىٰ إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(28:30) *And when he came to it, he was called from the right side of the valley, from the bush, [which was] in the blessed spot, saying: O Moses! Surely I am Allah, the Lord of the worlds.*

It is recorded in *al-Mufradāt* that the phrase *shāṭiʾi al-wādī* which occurs in this verse means "the side of the valley." He (al-Rāghib) writes:

> The original meaning of the word *al-wādī* is a place from which water streams forth and consequently the crevice between two mountains is called *wādī* ("a valley") while its plural is *awdiya.*

The term *al-buqʿah* that occurs in this verse means "a patch of earth or a piece of land that is different in appearance from the area around it or different in state from the area around it." And the meaning of the term *al-ayman* which occurs in this verse means "the right side (*al-ayman*), in contrast to the left (*al-aysar*)," and it occurs as an adjective describing and qualifying the term "side" (*shāṭiʾi*). Hence what some have opined regarding this adjective, which is that it means "auspicious, fortunate, good, and lucky" (*al-ayman*), in contradistinction to "inauspicious, ominous, ill-omened, and unfortunate" (*al-ashʾām*) is inconsequential.

The blessed spot was a special piece of land or a special patch of earth on the right side of the valley where there was a bush from which Moses was called. Its blessedness was due to it being honored and distinguished by divine closeness and divine speech. Moses had been ordered to remove

1 In the present-day Torah (Exodus 4:20), it is related that Moses was travelling to Egypt with his wife and children. (Auth.)

his shoes in it due to its sanctity and this is related by God in this account as it occurs in Sūrah al-Ṭāhā: *Therefore put off your shoes; you are in the sacred valley, Ṭuwā* (20:12). There is no doubt that the meaning of the verse is that the bush was the place from which the call and the speech of God arose or sprang forth, from one perspective or facet of meaning. However, the speech, which was the speech of God, was not situated or located in the bush, nor did it in-here or exist in the bush as does the speech of a speaker among us, which exists and is located in us. Therefore the bush served as nothing but a veil by which God veiled Himself and spoke to Moses from beyond it in a manner that was suitable and befitting His Sacred Being as well as appropriate and befitting with regards to the meaning of "veiling Himself." This is while in reality God encompasses everything. He says: *And it is not for any mortal that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger and revealing by His permission what He pleases; He is High, Wise* (42:51).

Some exegetes have held that the bush was the place of the speech because speech is a presentation or a demonstration that requires a place or a location to exist in or to be situated in. The weakness of this opinion should be clear given what we said above. Similar in weakness is the claim that this discourse indicates the most superior of the prophetic stations since this method of communication involves the prophets being able to hear the speech of God without any intermediary or a messenger who is sent forth [in the form of an angel]. The weakness of this claim lies in the fact that this particular discourse *was* from behind a veil—namely, the bush—and a veil is an intermediary, while the apparent meaning of the verse of Ṣūrah al-Shūra cited here-to-before is that the most superior form of divine communication is revelation that takes place without the intermediary of a veil or that of a messenger sent forth.

Saying: O Moses! Surely I am Allah, the Lord of the worlds: This verse contains information about the transcendent being of God which is identified here by the name "Allah." God is described by the quality of the unity of lordship, while absolutely negating any kind of association of another being with God. This is because God is the Master of the entire universe. Thus the Master is the master-manager of His kingdom and the One who deserves worship from His subjects. He does not leave out anything in His universe which could be subject to the authority of other than Him such that there could be a lord other than Him, and a god and

one worshiped other than Him.[1]

Thus the latter part of this verse contains an abridged form of God's call to Moses which God had expressed in detail in Sūrah al-Ṭāhā in respect of the three theological principles, these being: monotheism, prophethood, and resurrection, where He says: *Surely I am Allah. There is no Allah but I; therefore, serve Me and keep up prayer for My remembrance: Surely the hour is coming* (20:14-16).

وَأَنْ أَلْقِ عَصَاكَ ۖ فَلَمَّا رَآهَا تَهْتَزُّ كَأَنَّهَا جَانٌّ وَلَّىٰ مُدْبِرًا وَلَمْ يُعَقِّبْ ۚ يَا مُوسَىٰ أَقْبِلْ وَلَا تَخَفْ ۖ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الْآمِنِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(28:31) ***And saying: Cast down your staff. So when he saw it in motion as if it were a serpent, he turned back retreating and did not return. O Moses! Come forward and fear not; you are of those who are secure.***

An explanation for this verse has already been given in Sūrah al-Naml. As for the part of this verse that says: *O Moses! Come forward and fear not; you are of those who are secure*, this contains an implied elision which consists of the words: *It was said to him…* Thus this address contains an assurance to Moses, and this address brings to light the meaning of God's statement at this point in the narrative which occurs in Sūrah al-Naml, which says *O Moses! Fear not; the messengers shall not fear in My presence* (27:10), in that it was an assurance the meaning of which was: "You are a person sent forth as a messenger, and messengers sent forth are secure near

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1 The particle *an,* which occurs in this verse (*an yā Mūsā innī ana allahu*) is known as the explicative particle (*an al-tafsīriyya*). (Auth.)
This particle is always preceded by a sentence, a clause or a word which has the meaning of "to tell," "to say" but not containing a derivative of the verbal noun *al-qawl* ("to say," "to tell"). Thus in 28:30, the explicative particle *an* is preceded by a sentence which contains the verb *nūdiya* meaning "he was called out to" or "a voice was uttered calling out to him." This particle is then followed by a sentence or clause containing a specific speech or discourse which in 28:30 is: *O Moses! Surely I am Allah, the Lord of the worlds*. Thus this particle heads a subordinate clause or sentence introducing direct discourse and therefore the intent of the particle is to suggest the meaning of "to say or saying" just as it is translated here. This particle is observed to recur at the beginning of the immediately following verse too—that is, 28:31 –where it is followed by *cast down your staff* (28:31). (Trans.)

Me. They are not subject to rebuke or censure with regards to anything."

الرَّهْبِ ۖ فَذَانِكَ بُرْهَانَانِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَإِيهِ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(28:32) ***Put your hand into the opening of your bosom, it will come forth white without evil, and draw your hand to yourself to ward off fear: so these two shall be two arguments from your Lord to Pharaoh and his chiefs, they are a transgressing people.***

The imperative "put your hand into the opening of your bosom" means *insert it into it,* while the meaning of the term *al-sūʾu* ("evil") in this verse refers to leprosy in light of what is suggested and opined. Apparently, this qualifying detail occurs as a critical allusion to what occurs in this part of the narrative in the present-day Torah, which reads: "Then his Lord said to him also: 'insert your hand into your sleeve' and so he inserted his hand into his sleeve and then brought it out when lo! His hand was whitely leprous like snow!"[1] As for the part of this verse that says *and draw your hand to yourself to ward off fear: so these two shall be two arguments from your Lord to Pharaoh and his chiefs, they are a transgressing people*, the term *al-rahb* means "fear" [as do *al-rahab* and *al-ruhb*], while the term *al-janāḥ* which occurs in this verse is variously defined as "the hand" or "the upper arm or shoulder."

Some suggest that the meaning of the imperative in *and draw your hand to yourself to ward off fear* means that Moses should gather his hands to his chest when the turning of the staff into a snake causes fear in him so that the fear in his heart would dissipate. It is also suggested that when Moses cast the staff and it became a snake, he spread out his hands in fear like a person warding off harm, and these were his two arms. Thus he was told: "gather your hands to yourself," meaning "do not spread out your hands in fear of the snake, for you are secure from its harm." Both these suggestions, as you can see, are made on the basis that *and draw your hand to yourself to ward off fear* is a continuation of or a complement to what is said in the previous verse: *Cast down your staff. So when he saw it in motion as if it were a serpent, he turned back retreating and did not return. O Moses! Come forward and fear not; you are of those who are secure…*

1 Exodus 4:6.

(28:31)…*and draw your hand to yourself to ward off fear* (28:32). However such a consideration or opinion militates against the interposition of *Put your hand into the opening of your bosom, it will come forth white without evil*. This speech intervenes between these two sentences as a separating disconnect and without a conjunctive particle. It is also suggested that the imperative *and draw your hand to yourself to ward off fear* means that he should be resolute and determined with respect to what God wants of him, and to be diligent in carrying out the responsibility of messengership lest fear, which could overcome him in certain situations, prove a hurdle and a hindrance in the attainment of God's objective. However, it is not implausible that the meaning of the imperative is an instruction to Moses to adopt the characteristics of modesty and humility since it is in the nature of a proud and arrogant person who is enamored of himself to draw apart his arms from his sides like a person who stretches himself in arrogance in his gait. Thus this imperative, according to some interpretations, could be in the meaning of the instruction which God had given His Prophet Muḥammad in favor of humbleness towards the believers, as is mentioned in: *and make yourself gentle to the believers* (15:88).

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي قَتَلْتُ مِنْهُمْ نَفْسًا فَأَخَافُ أَنْ يَقْتُلُونِ ﴿٣٣﴾

(28:33) *He said: My Lord! Surely I killed one of them, so I fear lest they should slay me.*

This speech refers to Moses' killing of the Copt by means of a blow with the entirety of his fist. Thus he feared that the Copts would kill him in retaliation.

وَأَخِي هَارُونُ هُوَ أَفْصَحُ مِنِّي لِسَانًا فَأَرْسِلْهُ مَعِيَ رِدْءًا يُصَدِّقُنِي ۖ إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَنْ يُكَذِّبُونِ ﴿٣٤﴾

(28:34) *And my brother, Aaron, he is more eloquent of tongue than I, therefore send him with me as an aider, verifying me: I fear that they would reject me.*

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

> The (Arabic) expression *fulānun ridʾun li-fulānin* means "so-and-so is a *ridʾun* for so-and-so" if the former helps and aids the latter and strengthens his back [that is, "one backs and supports

the other"].

Moses' statement *I fear that they would reject me* serves to explain and justify his request to have Aaron sent along with him, while the context shows that Moses feared that the Copts would belie him. Consequently, this would anger him making him incapable of expressing his argument clearly due to a stutter that he suffered from in speech, and it does not mean that he made the request for Aaron to accompany him so that the Copts would not belie him. This is because the person who would belie him would not care to belie Aaron along with him. The evidence for this interpretation is what is related in Sūrah al-Shuʿarāʾ at this juncture of the narrative: *He said: O my Lord! Surely I fear that they will reject me, and my breast straitens, and my tongue is not eloquent; therefore, send Thou Aaron [to help me]* (26:12-13). Hence the meaning obtained is that Moses said: "My brother Aaron is more eloquent than I in speech, therefore send him along with me as my helper so that he may clarify and illustrate my truthfulness with regards to my claim if the Copts argue and dispute with me. This is because I fear they shall belie me and I shall consequently fail to express the truth of my claim."

قَالَ سَنَشُدُّ عَضُدَكَ بِأَخِيكَ وَنَجْعَلُ لَكُمَا سُلْطَانًا فَلَا يَصِلُونَ إِلَيْكُمَا ۚ
بِآيَاتِنَا أَنْتُمَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَكُمَا الْغَالِبُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(28:35) *He said: We will strengthen your arm with your brother, and We will give you both authority so that they shall not reach you due to Our signs; you two and those who follow you shall be uppermost.*

The expression in this verse which reads *[We will] strengthen your arm with your brother* means "to strengthen and fortify Moses by means of Aaron," while the expression *so they shall not reach you [both]* refers to the Copts' inability to overcome Moses and Aaron by killing them or something similar. This is as if there were two parties in competition with each other where one of the two parties was always ahead and foremost while the other could not even get to the first or reach it let alone overtake it.

Hence the meaning obtained is that God said: "We shall strengthen, fortify, and help you by means of your brother Aaron, and We shall establish for you both authority and an upper hand over them. Thus they shall not overcome you both because of Our signs due to which We shall grant

you both victory and triumph." Then, God said: *you two and those who follow you shall be uppermost*. This terminal speech in the verse serves to clarify and explain the speech preceding it, which was: *He said: … We will give you both authority so that they shall not reach you due to Our signs*. Hence the latter part of this verse sheds light that the authority to be granted would encompass Moses and Aaron as well as those who follow them from among mankind. Consequently, it becomes clear by this explanation that the term *sulṭān* ("authority") in this verse refers to subjugation, dominance, having an upper hand, and triumph. However, it is also suggested that this term (*sulṭān*) refers to the concept of *al-ḥujja* ("conclusive proof which would render all excuses untenable"), in which case it would be more appropriate that *due to Our signs* be considered as relating to the (terminal) part of this verse, which is *you two and those who follow you shall be uppermost* rather than to its immediately preceding part, which is *so that they shall not reach you*.[1] And they (that is, exegetes) have mentioned many other interpretations for this verse which would be futile to present here.

فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالُوا مَا هَٰذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُفْتَرًى وَمَا سَمِعْنَا بِهَٰذَا فِي آبَائِنَا الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(28:36) *So when Moses came to them with Our clear signs, they said: This is nothing but forged enchantment, and we have never heard of this from our fathers of old.*

This verse conveys that the enchantment or magic (*siḥr*) mentioned in this verse was described as being forged (*muftarā*).[2]

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1 What this means is that instead of reading this part of the verse as follows: *He said: … and We will give you both authority, so that they shall not reach you due to Our signs; you two and those who follow you shall be uppermost* (28:35) where the phrase *due to Our signs* is considered part of and as relating to the sentence preceding it, it is suggested, in light of the second interpretation of the term *sulṭān* that this verse should be read as follows: *He said: … and We will give you both authority, so that they shall not reach you; due to Our signs you two and those who follow you shall be uppermost* (28:35), where the phrase *due to Our signs* is taken to relate to and to be part of the succeeding sentence. (Trans.)

2 The adjective *muftarā* is a noun in the form of the passive participle, meaning

This is nothing but forged enchantment: is a reference to the divine signs that Moses came to them with. Hence the meaning is that what Moses had come forth with, of extraordinary and unusual signs, was nothing but forged magic and an enchantment that he had concocted and contrived, and then falsely attributed to God. *And we have never heard of this from our fathers of old* refers to the divine call Moses had come forth with and supported and proved with divine signs. The possibility that this terminal part of the verse refers to the divine signs [rather than to the divine call] is less probable since the repetition of the demonstrative pronoun *hādhā* ("this") in the terminal part of this verse (*and we have never heard of this from our fathers of old*) does not agree with such an interpretation.[1] Additionally, the Pharaoh and his people had claimed that they would bring forth something similar to it as God narrates of the Pharaoh in *So we too will produce before you magic like it* (20:58). Their apparent lack of knowledge or familiarity with magic and its lack of precedent in the form of an example does not detract from them being able to claim it. Hence the meaning obtained is that they claimed: "What Moses had come forth with was an innovated religion while it had not been reported from our forefathers that they had adopted it at any given time." This meaning corresponds with what is related in the next verse, which conveys the speech of Moses: *And Moses said: My Lord knows best who comes with guidance from Him and whose shall be the good end of the abode; the unjust shall not be successful* (28:37).

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ رَبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ جَاءَ بِالْهُدَىٰ مِنْ عِنْدِهِ وَمَنْ تَكُونُ لَهُ عَاقِبَةُ الدَّارِ ۖ إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(28:37) *And Moses said: My Lord knows best who comes with guidance from Him and whose shall be the good end of the abode; the unjust shall not be successful.*

"something forged, invented or fabricated without foundation." Alternatively, the adjective *muftarā* is considered to be in the form of *maṣdar mīmī* where the term *siḥr* is described and qualified by it to exaggerate and intensify it. (Auth.) *Maṣdar mīmī* is a verbal noun that begins with the letter *mīm*. (Trans.)

1 This means that the two demonstrative pronouns in this verse are a reference to two separate things, the first being a reference to the divine signs while the second being a reference to the divine call. (Trans.)

According to the context, this verse is Moses' response to their speech, which was *and we have never heard of this from our fathers of old* (28:36), which they made in refutation of Moses' call. Moses' response is in the form of a challenge, as if he were saying: "My Lord—who is the Lord of the universe and to who belongs the creation and the command—knows best who comes with guidance and whose end shall be good. He is the One who sent me forth as a messenger with guidance, which is the religion of monotheism, and has promised me that whosoever accepts and follows my religion shall have a good end where the proof for that is the clear signs which I have come forth with, from Him."

And Moses said: My Lord knows best who comes with guidance from Him: Moses meant himself here, while the meaning of "guidance" in this verse refers to the religious call which he came forth with. In *and whose shall be the good end of the abode*, the meaning of the phrase *ʿāqibatu al-dār* ("the good end of the abode") refers either to paradise in the hereafter which the fortunate shall inhabit just as God says while describing the inhabitants of paradise in *and He has made us inherit the land; we may abide in the garden where we please* (39:74) or it refers to the (life of this) world just as the following verse states: *Moses said to his people: Ask help from Allah and be patient; the land is Allah's; He causes such of His servants to inherit it as He pleases, and the end is for those who guard [against evil]* (7:128). Or it refers to a more general interpretation than the foregoing, whereby it includes both the life of this world and the hereafter. The third interpretation is the most preferred interpretation followed by the second interpretation, which Moses' explanation supports, such as in the verse: *And Moses said: …the unjust shall not be successful.*

And Moses said: …the unjust shall not be successful: This serves as an attempt at exposing the Pharaoh and his people, denying that the good end of the abode shall be theirs since they had established a mode of life based on tyranny which consisted of deviating from social justice which human nature guides towards, and which is in conformity with the cosmos.

Some exegetes have suggested that *And Moses said: My Lord knows best who comes with guidance from Him and whose shall be the good end of the abode; the unjust shall not be successful* is conjoined to the statement of rejection of the Pharaoh and his people [in the previous verse] which reads *they said: This is nothing but forged enchantment, and we have never heard of it from our fathers of old* (28:36). And this is in order to relate

both statements so that the listeners may weigh them both and distinguish between them as to which is valid and which is not; however, what we have suggested above which is that Moses' speech is in the form of a refutation of their statement is more in conformity with the literary context.

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ مَا عَلِمْتُ لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَٰهٍ غَيْرِي فَأَوْقِدْ لِي يَا هَامَانُ عَلَى الطِّينِ فَاجْعَلْ لِي صَرْحًا لَعَلِّي أَطَّلِعُ إِلَىٰ إِلَٰهِ مُوسَىٰ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّهُ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(28:38) ***And Pharaoh said: O chiefs! I do not know of any Allah for you besides myself; therefore kindle a fire for me, O Hāmān, to bake the mud, then prepare for me a lofty building so that I may obtain knowledge of Moses' Allah, and I think him to be one of the liars.***

This verse conveys an attempt by the Pharaoh at exposing Moses as a fraud and a liar by negating what he had brought forth of the true call, which was supported by miraculous signs. The Pharaoh intended to say that the truth of what Moses called to was not evident to him just as what he had brought forth of unusual and extraordinary signs as miracles from God was not convincing to him, and that he did not know for his people a god other than himself.

Thus Pharaoh's speech, narrated in *And Pharaoh said: O chiefs! I do not know of any Allah for you besides myself* is in the style of a concerted attempt at projecting feigned fairness and honesty so that he would win over their acceptance. This is also apparent from his statement narrated in another place in the Qur'an: *I do not show you aught but that which I see [myself], and I do not make you follow any but the right way* (40:29). Hence the meaning obtained is that the Pharaoh gave the impression to the chiefs that it did not appear to him from Moses' call and signs that there existed a God who was the lord of the universe. Neither was he convinced that there was a god other than himself. Thereafter he ordered Hāmān to construct a tower for him so that he might get to know the god of Moses. Therefore it becomes apparent that Pharaoh's speech in *And Pharaoh said: O chiefs! I do not know of any Allah for you besides myself…* was in the rhetorical style of concerted negation and exclusion. This is because Moses was establishing godhead and divinity in favor of God and negating it from

other than God while the Pharaoh was negating godhead from God and establishing it for himself. As for the rest of the deities that the Pharaoh and his people worshiped, there is no mention of them.

***Therefore kindle a fire for me, O Hāmān, to bake the mud, then prepare for me a lofty building* (ṣarḥan)…:** What is meant by the phrase "kindle a fire to bake the mud" is "to ignite or light a fire over the mud or clay in order to make bricks from it," which would then be used in construction, while the term *al-ṣarḥ* that occurs in this verse refers to a lofty structure [such as a tower]. This meaning is understood from the expression *ṣarḥ al-shayʾ* which means "something rising to prominence when it becomes apparent and manifest." Thus the verse refers to an imperative to bake bricks and to construct a lofty palace with them. As for the part of this verse which reads *so that I may obtain knowledge of Moses' Allah* (28:83), the Pharaoh attributed the word "god" to Moses in light of the fact that it was Moses who was calling towards Him. This speech is in the form of mentioning the conclusion in place of the introduction, the implication being: "Build a lofty palace for me *so that I may ascend to its highest levels and look at the heavens, perhaps [then] I shall get to know the Allah of Moses.*" This implies that the Pharaoh thought that God had a body and resided in one of the levels or stations of the heavens or space. Thus he hoped that if he looked from atop the highest level of the palace he would be able to get to know God. Alternatively, his statement aimed to blind, deceive, and misguide the people by obscuring the matter for them thereby rendering it confusing. It is also possible that he meant that an observation center be built for him so that he could observe the heavenly bodies and see if there existed things in the heavens that could prove to him the sending forth of a messenger or the truth of what Moses was describing. What supports this interpretation is what is related in another place in the Qur'an: *And the Pharaoh said: O Hāmān! Build for me a tower that I may attain the means of access—the means of access to the heavens—then reach the Allah of Moses, and I think him to be a liar…* (40:36-37).

The Pharaoh's words *and I think him to be one of the liars* (28:38) indicate a progression on Pharaoh's part from ignorance, which the beginning part of this verse indicates in *And Pharaoh said: O chiefs! I do not know of any Allah for you besides myself*, towards a supposition of God's nonexistence. However, he was lying by uttering this statement and was saying it merely to deceive and beguile the people, to render the matter obscure

and confusing, for them for Moses had addressed him with the following words: *Truly you know that none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth has sent down these as clear proof…* (17:102).

Some commentators have said that the Pharaoh's words *O chiefs! I do not know of any Allah for you besides myself* are in the form of negating the thing to be known [that is, God] by negating knowledge of it, in the sense that if God existed He would have manifested and revealed Himself, in which case this statement would resemble *Say: Do you [presume to] inform Allah of what He knows not in the heavens and the earth?* (10:18).[1] However, this interpretation does not agree with the verse's ending.

وَاسْتَكْبَرَ هُوَ وَجُنُودُهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا يُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(28:39) ***And he was unjustly proud in the land, he and his hosts, and they deemed that they would not be brought back to Us.***

This verse describes their state which was the state of one for whom the idea of not returning to God held greater sway, and greater weight and preponderance, while in their hearts and innermost beings they were convinced of it as God says in *And they denied them unjustly and proudly…* (27:14).

فَأَخَذْنَاهُ وَجُنُودَهُ فَنَبَذْنَاهُمْ فِي الْيَمِّ ۖ فَانْظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(28:40) ***So We caught hold of him and his hosts, then We cast them into the sea, and see how was the end of the unjust.***

The verbal noun *al-nabdh* that occurs in this verse means "to cast," "to throw," while *al-yamm* refers to "the sea" or "great waters," and the meaning of the rest of the verse is clear. This verse contains a sense of

1 The full verse is *And they serve beside Allah what can neither harm them nor profit them, and they say: These are our intercessors with Allah. Say: Do you (presume to) inform Allah of what He knows not in the heavens and the earth? Glory be to Him, and supremely exalted is He above what they set up (with Him)* (10:18).

slighting and making light of their matter, subjecting it to scorn, disdain and derision, and rendering the punishment that befell them as frighteningly alarming, which is clearly apparent.

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ ۖ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا يُنْصَرُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

(28:41) ***And We made them Imams who call to the fire, and on the day of resurrection they shall not be assisted.***

The phrase "to call to the fire" that occurs in this verse refers to the call that deserves the punishment of the fire due to disbelief and disobedience since it is this that shall be presented to the sinners on the Day of Resurrection as "the fire" in which they shall be punished and tormented. Or the intent of the expression "the fire" refers to what leads to deserving it, figuratively speaking, in the sense of mentioning the effect for the cause. *And We made them Imams who call to the fire…* means "rendering them precursors to the deviation, whom the subsequent generations would follow as an example." There is no harm in such a rendition since it is in the form of a figurative speech which renders them forerunners to disbelief and infidelity and not those who initiated disbelief in a matter. It is also suggested that the meaning of "rendering them imams who call to the fire" is to name them or to designate them as such in a manner similar to this verse: *And they make the angels—who are the servants of the Beneficent Allah—female [divinities]* (wa jaʿalū al-malāʾikata alladhīna hum ʿibād al-raḥmāniināthan, 43:19). However, the meaning of the succeeding verse, which will be discussed shortly, does not agree with such an interpretation. Additionally, the use of the word "made" (*al-jaʿl*) to mean "to name" (*al-tasmiyah*) in the verse under discussion comes across as unacceptable. *And on the day of resurrection they shall not be assisted* means they shall not benefit from the intercession of any helper.

وَأَتْبَعْنَاهُمْ فِي هَٰذِهِ الدُّنْيَا لَعْنَةً ۖ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ هُمْ مِنَ الْمَقْبُوحِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(28:42) ***And We caused a curse to follow them in this world, and on the day of resurrection they shall be of those made to appear hideous.***

This verse expresses a necessary consequence of the characteristics with which God has described the Pharaoh and his people in the previous

verse. Hence the Pharaoh and his people, due to their being leaders who call to the fire, whom the subsequent generations would follow and whom the latter would take as exemplars in disbelief and disobedience would have the effects of the latter's deviation and error arising from the latter's disbelief and disobedience continue to follow and dog them, and they would shoulder the burden similar to that of those who emulated and followed them. Therefore, a continuous curse and damnation would follow and dog them as long as disbelief and disobedience continued after them. Thus this verse has the meaning of: *And most certainly they shall carry their own burdens, and other burdens with their own burdens…* (29:13); *And We write down what they have sent before and their footprints…* (36:12).

Rendering the word *laʿnah* ("a curse") in an indefinite form indicates intensity and continuity. And so, while they would fail to obtain the intercession of any helper, their state would be such that souls would abhor and shun them, and people would flee from them; none would come near them. This has the meaning of repulsiveness, and God has described their repulsive and sorry state in many places in the Qur'an.

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Examining Narrations

(1) It is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās:
The Messenger of God was asked: "Which of the two terms did Moses complete?"
He replied: "The fuller, the more complete, and more drawn-out one."[1]

Author's comment: A report with the same meaning has been transmitted via Abū Dharr from the Messenger of God.

(2) It is narrated from Muqsim:
I met al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and asked him: "Which of the two terms did Moses complete? The first or the second?"
He replied: "The second one."[2]

(3) It is narrated from Imam al-Bāqir:
When Moses had completed the term and began the journey towards the house accompanied by his family, he lost the way, and

1 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, on the authority of al-Wāḥidi via his chain of transmission.

2 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr,* on the authority of Ibn Abī Shayba.

then saw fire. *He said to his family: Wait, I have seen a fire* (28:29).[1]

(4) It is narrated from Imam al-Bāqir:
God said in the story of Moses: *Put your hand into the opening of your bosom; it will come forth white without evil* (28:32). This means "without being leprous."[2]

(5) ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī relates with respect to *And my brother, Aaron, he is more eloquent of tongue than I, therefore send him with me as an aider, verifying me* (28:34):
The narrator said: "I asked Imam al-Bāqir: How long did Moses remain away from his mother till God returned him to her?"
He replied: "For three days."
I asked: "Was Aaron Moses' brother from the same mother and father?"
He replied in the affirmative: "Have you not heard God saying [relating Aaron's words]: *O son of my mother! Seize me not by my beard or by my head* (20:94)?"
I asked: "So who was the older of the two?"
He replied: "Aaron."
I asked: "So did the revelation come down to them both?"
He replied: "The revelation would come down to Moses and he would in turn intimate it to Aaron."
I said: "Tell me about the rules, judgments, commands, and prohibitions—were these for both of them?"
He replied: "Moses was the one who used to converse with his Lord and write down knowledge and judge between the Children of Israel while Aaron would take his place when Moses would be absent from his community having gone to converse with God."
I asked: "So which one of the two died before the other?"
He replied: "Aaron died before Moses while both of them died during the period when the Children of Israel were subjected to the tribulation of being lost."
I asked: "Did Moses have a son?"
He replied: "No, the son was that of Aaron and the progeny was

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1 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān,* on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

2 *Ṭibb al-Aʾimma,* via its chain of transmission on the authority of Jābir al-Juʿfī.

his."[1]

Author's comment: The last part of the report disagrees with other reports that say that Moses had a son, and the present-day Torah also indicates that.

(6) Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī narrates with respect to the verse *And he was unjustly proud in the land, he and his hosts…* (28:39) that one of the Imams said that Allah said:
Pride and grandeur are my robes while might and majesty are my covers (lit. "waist cloth"). Thus I will have anyone who disputes with Me regarding any of these cast into the fire.[2]

(7) It is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq:
The leaders in the Book of God are of two types. God says: *And We made them Imams who guided [people] by Our command* (21:73) and not by the command of the people. They prefer the command and judgment of God to their command and judgment. He said: *And We made them Imams who call to the fire* (28:41). The second set of leaders prefer their command and judgment to the command and judgment of God, and they follow their whims and desires in contrast to what is in the Book of God.[3]

Discussion about the Narrative of Moses and Aaron in Several Sections

1. Moses' Status with God and his Devotional Position.

Moses was one of the five prophets of determination and resolve (*ulūʾ al-ʿazm*). These prophets were the chiefs of the prophets. They were granted Books and law-codes, and God has mentioned His favor to them in: *And when We made a covenant with the prophets and with you, and with Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus, son of Mary, and We made with them a strong covenant* (33:7); *He has made plain to you of the religion which He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you and that which We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus…* (42:13).

God had conferred a favor on Moses and his brother Aaron as related

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī.*

2 *Jawāmiʿ al-Jāmiʿ.*

3 *Al-Kāfi,* via its chain of transmission on the authority of Ṭalḥa b. Zayd.

in: *And certainly We conferred a favor on Moses and Aaron…* (37:114), and He had greeted them both with peace (from Himself) as related in: *Peace be on Moses and Aaron* (37:120).

God extolled Moses with the best of praise as related in: *And mention Moses in the Book. He was one purified, and he was a messenger, a prophet. And We called to him from the blessed side of the mountain, and We made him draw nigh, holding communion [with Us]* (19:51-52).

He also said regarding him: *And he was worthy of regard with Allah.* (33:69); *And to Moses, Allah addressed His Word, speaking [to him].* (4:164).

God mentioned Moses along with those whom He mentioned of the prophets in Sūrah al-Anᶜām (6:84-88) and therefore made it known that these were the doers of good to others, and virtuous; that He had graced them with excellence in the worlds; and that He had chosen them and guided them to the straight path. He mentioned Moses along with a group of prophets in Sūrah Maryam and then mentions in the same sūrah (in 19:58) that these were those on whom He had bestowed favors. Thus in this manner God gathers together the following merits in Moses' praise: purity and sincerity, divine proximity, high regard, the quality of doing good to others, virtuousness, excellence, being chosen, being guided, and being the recipient of favors. A study of the meanings of these merits has already occurred in the appropriate places in this book, and similarly so with regards to the study of the meaning of the terms *al-nubuwwa* (prophethood), *al-risāla* (messengership), and *al-taklīm* (conversation with God). In addition, God mentions the book that was revealed to Moses. This was the Torah, which He described as a guide and a mercy (in 46:12); that it was a distinguishing criterion, a light, and a reminder (in 21:48); and that it contained guidance and light (in 5:44). He also said: *And We ordained for him in the tablets admonition of every kind and clear explanation of all things* (7:145).

However, God has mentioned in several places in the Qur'an that the Children of Israel had distorted the Torah and had differed regarding it. The story of Nebuchadnezzar and his second conquest of Palestine, his destruction of the Temple and burning of the Torah, his assembling the Jews in Babylon in the year 588 BCE, followed by the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the king in the year 538 BCE, the latter's permitting the Jews to return to Palestine a second time, and the writing of the Torah for them by Ezra the priest are all well-known in history; this commentary has

alluded to them in the course of the narrative on Jesus.

2) The Stories of Moses in the Qur'an

Moses is the prophet who is mentioned most often in the Qur'an. His name occurs in 166 places in the Qur'an, on the basis of a count made, while his story occurs in 34 sūrahs of the Qur'an, in summary, and in detail. He was favored and distinguished among the prophets with numerous miracles, and many of his outstanding miracles have been mentioned in the Qur'an such as his staff turning into a snake, the white hand, the flood, the locusts, the lice, the frogs, the blood, the parting of the sea, the descent of manna and quails, the bursting forth of springs from the rock due to him striking it with his staff, the enlivening of the dead, and the raising of the mountain above the people, and other miracles.

Parts of his life-story have been mentioned in the Qur'an but without these detailing all the small and great details; rather, these occur in a restricted form, narrating some parts of his life where the primary concern of the narrative is to convey guidance and advice as is the custom of the Qur'an in its mention of the stories of the prophets and their people.

These parts, which contain the totality of his stories, relate that he was born in Egypt, in an Israelite family, at a time when the Copts were killing the newly-born males of the Children of Israel due to the command of the Pharaoh. Consequently, his mother placed him in a casket and dropped it into the sea wherefrom the Pharaoh (unwittingly) picked him up and returned him to his mother for breast-feeding and nurturing, and he grew up in the house of the Pharaoh. Then he reached maturity and killed a Copt and fled from Egypt towards Midian in fear of the Pharaoh and his people, in that they would kill him in retaliation.

In Midian, he remained with Shuʿayb the Prophet and married one of his daughters. Thereafter, when he had completed the time period, he journeyed with his family, which is when he saw a fire on the mountainside. This was during a wintry night and at a time when he and his family had lost their way. So they halted, and he left his family and proceeded towards the fire so that he could bring his family a brand of fire or that he may find someone there who would help guide him to the right path. However, when he approached the fire, God called him from the right side of the valley, from the bush which was located in a blessed spot. Thus God spoke to him, selected him, and granted him the miracle of the staff

and the white hand from among nine signs, and chose him for the office of messengership, which included the call to the Pharaoh and his people, and the rescue of the Children of Israel. Thus God ordered him to go to the Pharaoh.

Consequently, Moses went to the Pharaoh. He called him to the truth, as well as asked him to let the Children of Israel leave with him, and to cease tormenting them. He showed him the sign of the staff and the white hand; however, the Pharaoh balked at his demands and opposed him by means of the magic of the magicians. The latter came forth with great magic consisting of snakes and serpents. Thus Moses threw down his staff and it devoured what the magicians had conjured. As a result, the magicians dropped down prostrate and said: "We have believed in the God of the worlds, the God of Moses and Aaron." However, the Pharaoh persisted in his rejection and disbelief and threatened and intimidated the magicians and did not believe. Nevertheless, Moses continued to call him and his people to the truth and continued to show them sign after sign such as the flood, the swarm of locusts, the lice, the frogs, and the blood, all of which were elaborate signs; however, the Pharaoh and his people persisted in their arrogance and disbelief. Whenever the plague would befall them, they would say: "Moses, pray for us to your Lord as He has promised you; if you remove the plague from us, we shall certainly believe in you and shall certainly allow the Children of Israel to leave with you." However, when God would remove the plague from them for a set time period, which they would complete, they would break their promise. So God commanded Moses to travel with the Children of Israel by night. Hence they set out till they reached the shore of the sea while the Pharaoh pursued them with his forces. When the two groups faced each other, Moses' companions exclaimed: "We shall be caught!" whereupon Moses said: "Never! My Lord is with me and He shall certainly guide me and show me a way out." Thus, God ordered him to strike the sea with his staff when lo! The water cleaved apart and they crossed the sea; however, Pharaoh and his forces followed them till they had all followed one another into the sea, which is when God let the waters close over them and drowned them all, to the very last one of them.

When God had saved the Children of Israel from the Pharaoh and his forces and had brought them to the shore, there was no water or herbage there, so He honored them by sending down to them manna and quails

while He instructed Moses to strike the rock with his staff. As a result, twelve springs spurted forth from it, and all the people knew their place of drinking the water. Thus, they drank from it and ate of the two items of food while the clouds shaded them.

Then God made an appointment with Moses for forty nights at the mount of al-Ṭūr for the sake of sending down the Torah to him, and so Moses chose seventy men from among his people in order that they may hear God's conversation with him, which they did; however, then they said: "We shall not believe in you till we see God manifest Himself openly." As a result, a bolt of lightning seized them while they looked on! Subsequently, God brought them back to life due to Moses' prayer. Thereafter, when the appointed time elapsed, God sent down to Moses the Torah and informed him that the Sāmirī had led his people astray after his departure, and as a result, they had begun to worship the calf.

So Moses returned to his people, angry, exasperated, and full of sorrow. He burned the calf and scattered its ashes into the sea. He expelled the Sāmirī, saying to him: "Go away! Surely, your lot in this life will be to say: Touch me not!" As for his people, he ordered them to repent and to mortify themselves, and so God forgave them. Thereafter, they insolently and arrogantly refused to accept the law of the Torah till God had raised the mount of al-Ṭūr above them! Then they got bored of eating manna and quails and said: "We shall never be able to bear one type of food," and so they asked Moses to beseech his God to bring forth for them what the earth grows of vegetables: cucumbers, garlic, lentils, and onions. Then they were ordered to enter the Sacred Land which God had destined for them, but they refused and consequently God denied it to them and subjected them to the trial of being lost such that they wandered in the land lost, confused, and bewildered, for forty years.

Moreover, part of the journey of Moses is mentioned in Sūrah al-Kahf. This is when, accompanied by a young man, he went to a place where two seas meet in order that he might meet a virtuous man, in whose company he remained till his separation from him.

3) The Status of Aaron near God and His Devotional Position

In Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt (37:114-122), God includes Aaron with Moses in divine blessings, in the receipt of the book, in being guided to the straight

path, and in being sent greetings. He describes Aaron as being among those who did good to others, and as being among God's believing servants. He deems him a messenger (20:47) and a prophet (19:53), and to be from those whom He had blessed (19:58). God also includes him, as He mentions in Sūrah al-Anʿām (84-88), among the ranks of the prophets, with respect to their merits of benevolence, goodness, grace, divine selection, and guidance. Aaron also features prominently in the prayer of Moses which the latter made during the night on Mount al-Ṭūr: *And give to me an aider from my family: Aaron, my brother. Strengthen my back by him, and associate him [with me] in my affair, so that we should glorify Thee much, and remember Thee oft. Surely, Thou art seeing us* (20:29-35).

Aaron supported his brother in all his stances, attending to him and adhering to him, participating with him in all his affairs, and aiding him in all his endeavors.

In the Qur'anic narratives, however, what is related regarding him is only the matter of his substituting for his brother when the latter was absent from his people, having gone for a divine appointment. Thus Moses said to his brother Aaron: "Take my place in my community, act righteously, and do not follow the path of those who work corruption." However, when Moses returned to his people full of anger and sorrow, for they had taken to worshiping the calf, he threw down the tablets and seized his brother's head, pulling him there-with, whereupon Aaron said: "Son of my mother, the people had rendered me weak and were nearly going to kill me, so do not let the enemies gloat over me, and do not include me among the oppressors." So Moses prayed: "My Lord, forgive me and my brother and let us enter into Your mercy, for You are the most merciful."

4) The Story of Moses in the Current Text of the Torah

The story of Moses occurs in all the books of the Torah save the first. These are the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In these books, there occur details of his life from the time he was born up until his death as well as details of what was revealed to him of the law. However, the details in the Torah regarding Moses' life and career differ significantly from those mentioned in the Qur'an. One of the most important of these differences is that the Torah mentions that God's call made to Moses and His speech with him from the bush took place in Midian before he travelled with his family. This occurred when he was tending

the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law, and priest of Midian.[1] So he drove the sheep beyond the desert and arrived at the mountain of God by the name of Ḥawrīb where God's angel manifested itself in a blaze of fire from the midst of the burning bush. Thus God called out to him and spoke to him and sent him to the Pharaoh for the sake of rescuing the Children of Israel.[2] Another difference between the two versions is regarding the identity of the Pharaoh to whom Moses was sent. The version in the Torah identifies the Pharaoh to whom Moses was sent as being different from the one who had picked him up and raised him and from whom he later fled in fear of reprisal due to killing the Copt.[3] Another difference is that the version in the Torah does not mention the change in faith of the magicians subsequent to them having thrown their staffs which became snakes, and which the staff of Moses seized and devoured; rather the version in the Torah mentions that they continued to side with the Pharaoh, and that they competed with and opposed Moses with respect to the two signs of blood and frogs that he brought forth as miracles by contriving similar things.[4]

Another difference between the two versions is that the narrative in the Torah says that the one who made the calf for the Children of Israel, which they then worshiped, was Aaron the prophet and brother of Moses! This was when the people saw that Moses had delayed in returning from the mountain and so the people gathered around Aaron and told him: "Get up and make a god for us which would march in front of us since we do not know what has happened to this man who brought us out from the land of Egypt." So Aaron responded to them by saying: "Remove the earrings from the people—those which are in the ears of your women, sons, and daughters—and bring them to me." So the people removed the gold earrings which were in their ears and came to Aaron with them who took them and fashioned the gold with a chisel and made it appear as a moulded calf and said: "This is your god, O Israel, which brought you out

1 The Torah identifies the father of Moses' wife as Jethro, the priest of Midian.

2 Exodus 3.

3 Exodus 2:23.

4 Exodus 7 and 8.

from the land of Egypt."[1] It would be clear to any one reflecting on this version of the account as it occurs in the Torah, that the Qur'anic version contains a critical exposition of the former version.

There are many partial differences between the two versions, such as the anecdote of the killing of the Copt by Moses. The version in the Torah identifies both the contenders as Israelites, in contrast to the Qur'an. There is also the difference between the versions with respect to the one identified as casting down the staff which devoured the snakes of the magicians. In the Torah, the one who casts down the staff is Aaron, who casts it by the order of Moses. Similarly, the version in the Torah does not mention the choosing of seventy people for the divine appointment, or the descent of the thunderbolt on them and their being brought back to life. In addition, the version in the Torah says that the tablets which were with Moses when he descended from the mountain and which he threw down in rage were two tablets of stone, and these were two tablets of the testimony, and other such differences.

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1 Exodus 2 and 30.

Verses 43-56

The context of the verses in this section attests that the polytheists from the Prophet Muḥammad's people consulted some of the People of the Book and sought their opinion regarding his claims. The polytheists presented to the People of the Book some of the Qur'anic verses revealed to the Prophet while the Qur'anic revelation confirmed and endorsed the Torah. The People of the Book who were consulted responded by authenticating and confirming the Prophet as well as expressing their faith in the true knowledge and wisdom that the Qur'an contained, adding that they had recognized the Prophet by his attributes and characteristics well before he was commissioned, just as God said: *And when it is recited to them, they say: We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord; we were submitters before this* (28:53).

However, such a response displeased the polytheists, and they quarreled with the People of the Book and used rude language towards them. They said: "The Qur'an is a work of magic, and the Torah is a work of magic like it: *Two [works of] magic backing up each other*" (28:48), and they said: *Surely we are unbelievers in all* (28:48). As a result, the People of the Book turned away from them, saying: *Peace be on you; we do not desire the ignorant* (28:55).

What comes across upon reading the noble verses in this sūrah is that God relates the story of Moses and informs how He made a people who were weak, enslaved, and persecuted such that their sons were killed while their women-folk were allowed to live, to triumph over a people who considered themselves exalted—who were arrogant, tyrannical and corrupt. This triumph occurred by means of a child from among the weak and persecuted people whom God raised in the very lap of his enemy—an enemy by whose order thousands of the sons of the weak and persecuted people were killed. Then God led the child out from among the arrogant and tyrannical people when the child had grown to maturity, subsequently sending him forth as a messenger and returning him to the arrogant and tyrannical people, rendering him triumphant over them, till He drowned the arrogant and tyrannical people altogether while He saved the nation of Israel such that they became the heirs.

When God relates this narrative here, He adds to it the mention of the Torah: a heavenly book which contained details of the message and the call and by means of which the proof became complete, and which contained the remembrance. Thus God mentions that He revealed the Torah to Moses in which were clear arguments, guidance, and mercy for mankind so that mankind would hearken, pay heed, and remember, and thereby desist from the disobedience of God after He had destroyed the past generations due to their disobedience.

Thus, in a similar manner, God revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet Muḥammad and narrated to him the stories of Moses. All this was while the Prophet Muḥammad did not witness the revelation of the Torah to Moses, nor was he present at the mountain of al-Ṭūr when God called out to Moses and spoke to him. In addition, God narrated to the Prophet what transpired between Moses and Shuʿayb although the Prophet was not resident in Midian, reciting to the Meccans His signs; rather it was God who revealed and narrated to the Prophet what He narrated as a mercy from Himself so that the Prophet may warn a people by it—a people to whom no warner had come before the Prophet. This was because the people to whom the warning was addressed had become deserving of divine punishment and deserving of being afflicted with adversity and calamity due to their ingratitude, disbelief, and wickedness. Thus, were God not to reveal a book and were He not to convey the call, the ungrateful, disbelieving, and wicked people would have said: "Our Lord if You had sent us a messenger from Yourself, we would have followed and obeyed the signs," and as a result the proof would be in their favor and against God .

However, when the truth came to them from God by means of the prophetic mission of the Prophet Muḥammad who was sent to them, and by means of the revelation of the Qur'an, they reacted with the statement: *Why is he not given the like of what was given to Moses? What! Did they not disbelieve in what Moses was given before?* (28:48) This disbelief and rejection on their part was when they had consulted the People of the Book regarding the claims of the Prophet, which the People of the Book authenticated and confirmed, whereupon the polytheists said: *Two [works of] magic backing up each other* (28:48), meaning thereby the Torah and the Qur'an. They also said: *Surely we are unbelievers in all* (28:48).

Then, God taught His Prophet the conclusive proof against them with: *Say: Then bring some [other] book from Allah which is a better guide*

than both of them, [that] I may follow it, if you are truthful (28:49). What God meant was that it was imperative in God's wisdom that there should be a book revealed from Himself which guides to the truth, by which the proof to mankind is made complete, and which they would know. Hence if the Torah and the Qur'an were not books of guidance and if they were not sufficient for the guidance of mankind, then there must be a book that is a better guide than these two. However, that was not the case since these two books contained right knowledge and wisdom, supported by miracles and intelligent evidence, in addition to which there was no heavenly book that was better in guidance to these two. Thus the two books were books of guidance while the people who were turning away from these two books were following and obeying their desires and whims and had strayed from the right path, which is described in: *But if they do not answer you, then know that they only follow their low desires; and who is more erring than he who follows his low desires without any guidance from Allah? Surely Allah does not guide the unjust people* (28:50)

Thereafter, God praises a group of the People of the Book whom the polytheists had consulted regarding the matter of the Prophet (Muḥammad) and the Qur'an. These were the People of the Book who had manifested their faith and belief (in the Prophet and the Qur'an) to the polytheists, and had subsequently turned away from the polytheists and avoided the futile and nonsensical speech with which the latter confronted them.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا أَهْلَكْنَا الْقُرُونَ الْأُولَىٰ بَصَائِرَ لِلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(28:43) ***And certainly, We gave Moses the Book after We had destroyed the former generations, as clear arguments for men and as guidance and mercy, that they may be mindful.***

This book was the Torah, which was given to Moses by means of God's revelation to him.[1]

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1 The letter *lām* (in *wa laqad ātaynā*) indicates an oath. (Auth.)
The letter *lām* mentioned in the text and suggested as indicating an oath is identified as the intensifying letter *lām* that functions as the complement of an oath which oath is elided here. Thus the meaning is: "I swear *that certainly*

After We had destroyed the former generations refers to the generations preceding the revelation of the Torah such as the people of the Prophet Noah and the people after them from among those that were destroyed. This possibly includes the people of the Pharaoh too among them. The registration of this clause here contains an indication of the urgent and dire need by then for the revelation of the book due to the loss of the divine teachings as a result of the passing away of the past generations, and for the sake of drawing attention in the book of God to their stories and experiences, and to the advent of divine punishment on them due to their belying the signs of God. This was so that those who wished to reflect may do so by means of it and so that those who wished to remember and pay heed would do so by it.

As for the phrase *baṣāʾira li al-nās* ("clear arguments for men") that occurs in this verse, the term *baṣāʾir* is the plural of the term *baṣīrah.* This term means "that by means of which someone perceives and understands something," while what is intended by this plural term are the clear and evident proofs by means of which a person perceives and understands the truth and by which a person distinguishes between truth and falsehood.[1]

As for the term *hudan* which occurs in this verse, it has the meaning of "the guide (to the right path)" or "that by which one is guided aright." Similarly, the word *raḥmah* which occurs in this verse has the meaning of "that due to which one qualifies for mercy and compassion."[2]

We gave Moses the book…" (Trans.)

1 This term occurs here as denoting the state or the circumstance (*al-ḥāl*) of the book (revealed). It is also suggested that this term is employed here in the grammatical sense of *mafʿūl lahu*. (Auth.)
Al-ḥāl as a grammatical feature refers to a word or a phrase used to describe the state, condition or circumstance of something. The state, condition or circumstance for it is obtained at the time when the action of the main verb takes place, which in this case is identified as the verb *ātaynā*, translated as "We gave (Moses the book)."
Mafʿūl lahu refers to an indefinite verbal noun in the accusative, which is used adverbially and gives the reason or the motive for the action of the main verb which occurs at the beginning of this verse, which is identified as being the first person plural perfect tense verb *ātaynā*, translated as: "We gave."

2 Both these terms occur as denoting the state or the circumstance (*al-ḥāl*) of the book (revealed) just like the term *baṣāʾir*, or, as it is also suggested that these two terms are employed in the grammatical sense of *mafʿūl lahu.* (Auth.)

Hence the meaning obtained is: "I swear, certainly, We had given Moses the book which was the Torah. This was after We had destroyed the earlier generations and consequently wisdom dictated that the warning and the call be renewed such that the new book revealed would serve as clear proof by means of which mankind would perceive and understand right knowledge. It would also serve as guidance by means of which mankind would be guided to the right knowledge, in addition to which it would also serve as mercy, whereby mankind would qualify for mercy and compassion due to acting in accordance to its laws and regulations so that they would recall the beliefs and deeds that were obligatory on them."

وَمَا كُنْتَ بِجَانِبِ الْغَرْبِيِّ إِذْ قَضَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَى الْأَمْرَ وَمَا كُنْتَ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(28:44) ***And you were not on the western side when We revealed to Moses the commandment, and you were not among the witnesses.***

This is addressed to the Prophet Muḥammad while the description *al-gharbī* ("western") that occurs in this verse serves as an adjective which describes and qualifies a noun that is elided, the elided noun being either "the valley" or "the mountain." The intent would be "on the side of the western valley" (*bi-jānib al-wādī al-gharbī*) or "on the side of the western mountain" (*bi-jānib al-jabal al-gharbī*).[1]

When We revealed to Moses the commandment: This revelation included the meaning of "covenant," while the meaning of revealing the covenant to Moses, according to what is suggested, refers to the rules and regulations that relate to the office of prophecy, which were conveyed by the revelation of the Torah to him. As for the covenant made to him with respect to the office of messengership, this is indicated by the subsequent verse, which is: *And you were not on this side of the mountain when We called…* (28:46) while the part of this verse which reads *and you were not*

1 This is in contrast to the way in which most translators render this verse in translation. They appear to consider the adjective *al-gharbī* as qualifying the word *jānib* within the possessive construct phrase *bi-jānib al-wādī or al-jabal al-gharbī* rather than qualifying the words *al-wādī* or *al-jabal,* the suggested elided nouns. Consequently they translate this part of the verse as: "on the western side of the valley or mountain." (Trans.)

among the witnesses serves as a reiterating confirmation of what has been mentioned before.

Therefore the meaning obtained is: "You were neither present nor were you a witness when We revealed the Torah to Moses on the side of the western valley or on the side of the western mountain."

وَلَٰكِنَّا أَنشَأْنَا قُرُونًا فَتَطَاوَلَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْعُمُرُ ۚ وَمَا كُنتَ ثَاوِيًا فِي أَهْلِ مَدْيَنَ تَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِنَا وَلَٰكِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(28:45) ***But We raised up generations, then life became prolonged to them; and you were not dwelling among the people of Midian, reciting to them Our communications, but We were the senders.***

The phrase "then life became prolonged to them" which occurs in this verse means the continuation and prolongation of the time-period, while the initial part of this verse which reads *But We raised up generations, then life became prolonged to them* occurs as supplemental information for the Prophet as well as to make up for the negation that was mentioned in the previous verse: *And you were not on the western side when…* (28:44).

Hence the meaning obtained is: "You were not present there, witnessing what was unfolding there; however, We brought forth or created generations after Moses and their life became prolonged for them. Then We revealed his story to you as well as the news of the revelation of the book that was revealed to him."

Hence, this part of the verse is succinct and concise due to an elision, since the context provides sufficient meaning and sense.

And you were not dwelling among the people of Midian, reciting to them Our communications, but We were the senders: The term *al-thāwī* that occurs in this verse means "resident or residing, dwelling." It is said in Arabic for a person who takes up residence or settles down in a place that he had: *thawā fī al-makān* translated as "he settled down or resided in the place" while the pronoun *him* refers to the polytheists of Mecca to whom the Prophet used to recite the verses of God which conveyed what happened to Moses in Midian during the latter's residence there.

The end part of this verse that reads *but We were the senders* occurs with the aim of removing any ambiguity and to make up the negation and denial mentioned earlier in this verse.

Hence the meaning obtained is: "You were not resident with the people

of Midian—and these were Shuʿayb and his people—witnessing what was happening to Moses there whilst reciting Our signs to the polytheists which convey his news; rather, it was We who sent you as a messenger to your people, revealing to you these verses so that you may recite them to the people."

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وَمَا كُنْتَ بِجَانِبِ الطُّورِ إِذْ نَادَيْنَا وَلَٰكِنْ رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ لِتُنْذِرَ قَوْمًا مَا أَتَاهُمْ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(28:46) ***And you were not on the side of the mountain when We called, but a mercy from your Lord that you may warn a people to whom no warner came before you, that they may be mindful.***

What is apparent upon comparing this verse with the previous one, which reads: *And you were not on the western side when We revealed to Moses the commandment…* (28:44) is that the meaning of the "call" in this verse refers to the call made from the bush or tree during the night in which Moses saw the fire on the side of the mountain of al-Ṭūr, while the phrase *but a mercy from your Lord* that occurs here does so in the sense of providing additional information and for making up for the negation that occurs at the onset of this verse, and so it provides supplemental information in order to remove any ambiguity or confusion.[1] There is a shift in the mode of the divine discourse in the middle of this verse from the immediately previous verses as well as from the beginning part of this verse where God speaks to the Prophet in conversation, always referring to Himself in the first person plural to speaking about Himself (in the middle of this verse) as if He is absent from the place of the conversation as indicated by the use of the second person singular pronoun "your" in this verse *but a mercy from your Lord*. This is to prove the total and consummate attention and care of God for the Prophet.

That you may warn a people to whom no warner came before you: It is apparent that the mention of "a people" in this verse is a reference to the people at the time of the Prophet or a reference to them and to those

1 It is apparent that the term *raḥmah* ("a mercy") which occurs in this verse is in the grammatical sense of *mafʿūl lahu*. (Auth.)

2 This is an indefinite verbal noun in the accusative, which is used adverbially and gives the reason or the motive for the action of a verb. (Trans.)

associated with them from their forefathers since the prophets from among them such as Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb, and Ishmael had long passed away.

Hence the meaning obtained is: "You were not present at the side of the mountain of al-Ṭūr when We called out to Moses, spoke to him, and chose him for the office of messengership such that you would be acquainted with it and informed about it like one who was present there as a witness; however, We have informed you of it as a mercy from Ourselves so that you may warn a people to whom no warner had come before you so that they may mind."

وَلَوْلَا أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ فَيَقُولُوا رَبَّنَا لَوْلَا أَرْسَلْتَ إِلَيْنَا رَسُولًا فَنَتَّبِعَ آيَاتِكَ وَنَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(28:47) ***And were it not that there should befall them a disaster for what their hands have sent before, then they should say: Our Lord! Why didst Thou not send to us a messenger so that we should have followed Thy communications and been of the believers?***

The meaning of the phrase "what their hands have sent before" that occurs in this verse refers to the sins and evil which they had earned due to their beliefs and practices. This is understood from the terminal part of this verse, while the meaning of the term *muṣībah* ("a disaster") which would befall them refers to a disaster whose extent is more pervasive and broader in scope than the disaster of the world alone or that of the hereafter alone since turning away from the truth through disbelief and immorality entails divine punishment in the world as it entails divine punishment in the hereafter. A discussion regarding this issue has already taken place in the context of *And if the people of the towns had believed and guarded [against evil] We would certainly have opened up for them blessings from the heaven and the earth* (7:96) and other verses.

Then they should say: Our Lord! Why didst Thou not send to us a messenger so that we should have followed Thy communications and been of the believers? This occurs as a concomitant to not sending forth divine messengers. The implied meaning is: "We would certainly not have sent a messenger" (*lamā arsalnā rasūlan*).[1]

1 The apodosis of the (unlikely negative) conditional sentence is elided due to it being apparent. (Auth.)

Hence the meaning obtained is: "Had it not been that the disbelievers would have a valid argument against Us supposing no messenger was sent to them and due to which they would be overtaken by what their hands had sent forth of disbelief and immorality, We would certainly not have sent forth a messenger to them, but for their saying: "Our Lord, if only You had sent us a messenger we would have followed and obeyed Your signs which the messengers would recite to us, and we would have been believers."

فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ عِنْدِنَا قَالُوا لَوْلَا أُوتِيَ مِثْلَ مَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ ۚ أَوَلَمْ يَكْفُرُوا بِمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ قَالُوا سِحْرَانِ تَظَاهَرَا وَقَالُوا إِنَّا بِكُلٍّ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(28:48) ***But [now] when the truth has come to them from Us, they say: Why is he not given the like of what was given to Moses? What! Did they not disbelieve in what Moses was given before? They say: Two [works of] magic backing up each other; and they say: Surely we are unbelievers in all.***

The beginning part of this verse means: "We sent a messenger to them with the truth and revealed the book." It is clear that the book refers to the book that was revealed to the messenger, which is the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. However, when the truth came to them from Us, they said: *Why is he not given the like of what was given to Moses?* Their statement—"why is the Prophet not given the like of the Torah, which was given to Moses?"—suggests that they intended that the Qur'an be revealed all at once, just as God relates about them in: *And those who disbelieve say: Why has not the Qur'an been revealed to him all at once?* (25:32)

God responded to their statement with: *What! Did they not disbelieve in what Moses was given before? They say: Two [works of] magic backing up each other*. What they meant by this statement of theirs was in reference to the Qur'an and the Torah.

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2 The potential harm is that the disobedient would have had a valid argument against God. The unlikely negative conditional sentence is indicated by the particles *law lā* occurring at the very beginning of this verse. (Trans.) Also see the translator's note under verse 28:10. (Ed.)

And they say: Surely we are unbelievers in all: The difference between the two statements—*Two [works of] magic backing up each other* and *Surely we are unbelievers in all*—is that the first one is a negation of faith in the two books while the second is a negation of faith in the very principle of prophethood. Perhaps it is due to this difference in meaning between the two statements that the verb *qālū* ("they said") is repeated in this verse.

قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِكِتَابٍ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ هُوَ أَهْدَىٰ مِنْهُمَا أَتَّبِعْهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(28:49) ***Say: Then bring some [other] book from Allah which is a better guide than both of them [that] I may follow if you are truthful.***

This verse occurs as a concomitant to the accusation that the Qur'an and the Torah were works of magic, backing each other up. This concomitance would be invalid unless it was incumbent that there was among mankind a book from God that guides them while at the same time it was incumbent on them to follow it. Thus, if the two books were works of magic and false, then it would mean that the truth lay elsewhere, in another book. This concomitance is similar to the concomitance that God clarifies in: *And were it not that there should befall them a disaster for what their hands have sent before, then they should say: Our Lord! Why didst Thou not send to us a messenger so that we should have followed Thy communications and been of the believers?* (28:47).

Mankind has a right on God that He should reveal a book to them and send forth a messenger to them. It is for this reason that God instructed His Prophet to demand of them a book other than these two, a book which would supposedly be a better guide than these two so that he may follow it.

Therefore, if the two books were works of magic and backing each other up then they would be false and misguided and devoid of any guidance while the other book, other than these two, which they would bring forth, would supposedly be a better guide than these two—it being necessary that the comparative adjective (*ahdā*) be applicable to both: the thing preferred [that is, the other book] and the thing that is preferred over [that is, the Qur'an and the Torah]—however the situation, in light of it being a situation of debate and argumentation, claims that the two books are rightly-guiding while there is no other book that is superior to

them both in guidance. Therefore if the opponent does not accept this claim, then the opponent would consequently need to come forth with a book that is superior to these two in the sense and meaning which corresponds and relates to the two books, which means that the opponent would have to bring forth a book that is a better guide than them both. This is even if the noble Qur'an declares that corruption and defect had seeped into the current Torah, which would not befit it being considered a book of guidance in an absolute sense; however, the verse in question is actually referring to the original Torah that was revealed to Moses, which is the book that the Qur'an authenticates and vouches for.

Moreover, the subject of the verse in question is the consideration of the two books together while the Qur'an corrects the current Torah by mentioning corruption in it. Thus it is these two books together that are guidance while no book is a better guide than these two. As for the part of this verse that reads *if you are truthful*, this is in relation to their claim that the two are works of magic, backing each other up.

فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا لَكَ فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّمَا يَتَّبِعُونَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ ۚ وَمَنْ أَضَلُّ مِمَّنِ
اتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ بِغَيْرِ هُدًى مِنَ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾

(28:50) ***But if they do not answer you, then know that they are only following their low desires; and who is more erring than he who follows his low desires without any guidance from Allah? Surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.***

The verbal nouns *al-istijāba* and *al-ijāba* mean one and the same. Both generally mean "to answer," "to respond," "to reply."[1]

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1 The author of *al-Kashshāf* writes:
This verb, in its transitive mode, takes "the call" or "the petition made" (that is, *al-duʿā*) as its grammatical object, just as it takes "the caller" or "the petitioner" or "the one making the call" (that is, *al-dāʿī*) as its grammatical object by means of the letter *lām*. However in most cases the call made (that is, *al-duʿā*) is not mentioned as the grammatical object of the verb if the one making the call, that is, the caller or the petitioner (that is, *al-dāʿī*) is mentioned as the grammatical object of this verb. Thus it may be said: *istajāba allahu duʿāʾahu* ("God responded to his call or petition"), just as it may be said: *istajāba lahu* ("He responded to him"). However the call made (*al-duʿā*) and the one making the call (*al-dāʿī*) are hardly ever mentioned together or simultaneously as the

But if they do not answer you then know that they are only following their low desires: occurs as a concomitant to the previous verse, which was *Say: Then bring some [other] book from Allah which is a better guide than both of them…* (28:49). It means: "If you told them such and such and challenged them with it yet they did not bring a book that was a better guide than the Qur'an and the Torah while it was specifically identified that there is no guidance which is more complete and perfect than the guidance contained in these two books, and despite that they still accuse the two works of being works of magic and turn away from them, then know that they are not in search of the truth nor are they interested in following what is clearly attested to by the intellect; rather, they are merely following their whims and desires and are simply defending their desires and fancies by such false remarks as *Two [works of] magic backing up each other…* (28:48) and *We are unbelievers in all*."

It is also possible that the intent of *then know that they are only following their low desires* is: "If they do not bring forth a book that is better in guidance than these two while they persist in rejecting these two, then know that they are establishing their mode of life on following and obeying their whims and fancies. They do not have faith in the principle of prophethood or in the principle that God sends forth heavenly teachings to them by means of revelation and inspiration requiring them to follow it and to conduct their lives in accordance with their Lord's guidance." Perhaps the next part of the verse supports this meaning and interpretation, namely: *And who is more erring than he who follows his low desires without any guidance from Allah? Allah does not guide the unjust people.*

The question in this verse which reads *and who is more erring than he who follows his low desires without any guidance from Allah?* is a rhetorical question which indicates a negation with a tone of rebuke.[1] Its intent is to

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grammatical objects of this verb, which means it is hardly ever said: *istajāba lahu duʿāʾahu* ("He answered or responded to the petitioner's plea" or "He answered or responded to the caller's petition"). (Auth.)

2 The second case identified here occurs in this verse where the verb *yastajībū* takes the one making the call or the petitioner (that is, *al-dāʿī*), who is identified by the masculine second person singular pronoun *-ka* as its grammatical object by means of the letter *lām—yastajībū laka*. (Trans.)

1 For instance: "None! None is more erring that he who follows his low desires without any guidance from Allah." (Trans.)

conclude that the Meccan polytheists are a people who are errant, while *Allah does not guide the unjust people* explains that their state of being errant is due to their following their whims and desires. This is because following whims and desires lead to deviating from the truth and from the path of guidance, which is consequently an injustice and an inequity, and God does not guide the unjust, while the one not guided is lost and astray.

Thus the proof obtained is that if they do not bring forth a book which is better in guidance than these two and at the same time they refuse to believe in these two books then it means they are merely following their whims and desires, while a person who follows his or her whims and desires is unjust and the unjust are not guided aright, and one who is not guided aright is lost and astray.

وَلَقَدْ وَصَّلْنَا لَهُمُ الْقَوْلَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

(28:51) ***And certainly, We have made the word to reach them so that they may be mindful.***

The meaning is: "We (that is, God) (repeatedly) conveyed or revealed the Qur'an to them in a manner such that its parts followed each other in connected, sequential revelation; a verse followed by another in sequence, a sūrah coming in the wake of another sūrah in sequence, where these (verses and sūrahs) contained promises, warnings, rules, anecdotes, lessons, judgments, and advice so that they would pay heed and remember."[1]

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ هُمْ بِهِ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

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1 In this verse, the third person plural pronoun refers to the Meccan polytheists. The verbal noun *al-tawṣīl* is on the pattern of *al-tafʿīl*. This pattern denotes the meaning of increase and abundance with respect to the verbal noun of the first or root form of the verb [that is, it intensifies the meaning of the root form]. The verbal noun of the first or root form of *al-tawṣīl* is *al-waṣl* ("delivering," "arriving," "connection," "reaching.")

3 An example of the relationship between first and second form verbal nouns is with respect to the root *q-ṭ-ʿ* ("to cut"). Its first form verbal noun *al-qaṭʿu* means "to cut," "to chop," "to sever," whereas its second form verbal noun *al-taqṭīʿ* means "to cut (something) into pieces," "to dismember." Another example relates to the root *q-t-l* ("to kill"). Its first form verbal noun, *al-qatl*, means "to kill," whereas the second form verbal noun *al-taqtīl* means "to massacre," "to butcher." (Auth.)

(28:52) ***[As to] those whom We gave the Book before it, they are believers in it.***

The two pronouns that occur in this verse refer to the Qur'an. It is also suggested that these two pronouns refer to the Prophet Muḥammad; however, the first identification is more in harmony with the context of the verse. This and the following verses contain praise in favor of a group of believers from the People of the Book. This praise comes subsequent to the censure and criticism of the polytheists of Mecca in the previous verses.

The context of the terminal parts of these verses testifies that these praised people were a specific group from the People of the Book who had believed in the Qur'an; therefore, the claim that the expression "the People of the Book" mentioned in these verses refers to the generality of the believers from among them is inconsequential.

وَإِذَا يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ إِنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(28:53) ***And when it is recited to them, they say: We believe in it surely it is the truth from our Lord; we were submitters before this.***

The singular pronouns that occur in this verse refer to the Qur'an, while the letter *lām* prefixed to the word *ḥaqq* is to convey the meaning of definite specificity. Thus the meaning obtained is: "When the Qur'an is recited to them (that is, to the People of the Book), they say: We believe in it, surely it is the truth which we know of and which we know to be from our Lord, and we are familiar with it, and we knew it from before."

We were submitters before this occurs in order to explain the Qur'an's position and status of being the truth and of it being well-known among them, the meaning being: "We were submitters to it, even before its revelation," or: "We were believers in the religion which the Qur'an calls to and which it calls 'Islām' even before its revelation."

It is also suggested that the two pronouns that occur in this verse refer to the Prophet Muḥammad; however, what has been explained above is more in conformity with the context. However it may be, what the People of the Book meant was what they had read in their sacred scriptures of the attributes and characteristics of the Prophet and the book which would be revealed to him. For example, this is what the following verses

indicate: *Those who follow the Messenger-Prophet, the* ummī, *whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Evangel…* (7:157); *Is it not a sign to them that the learned men of the Israelites know it?* (26:197).

أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْتَوْنَ أَجْرَهُمْ مَرَّتَيْنِ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَيَدْرَءُونَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ السَّيِّئَةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

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(28:54) ***These shall be granted their reward twice, because they are steadfast, and they repel evil with good and spend out of what We have given them.***

This verse contains a beautiful promise for the People of the Book for what they had done, and it contains praise in their favor for their good conduct and patient indulgence towards the impetuous polytheists. Therefore the most suitable understanding of the intent of the part of this verse which reads *these shall be granted their reward twice…* is that it means they shall be granted the reward of their faith in their own scripture and the reward of their faith in the Qur'an as well as for their patience for the sake of their faith, which was followed by a subsequent faith in what it entailed of struggle and effort required to rally against their desires.

It is also suggested that the meaning of this verse is that they shall be granted reward due to their patience for the sake of their religion and for the harm they suffered and endured at the hands of the unbelievers and due to them enduring discomfort and hardship; however, you are already aware of which meaning the context supports.

As for the part of this verse that reads *and they repel* (yadraʾūna, from al-darʾu) *evil with good*, the term *al-darʾu* means "to repel," "to push," "to avert," and "to overcome," while the meaning of the two terms *al-ḥasanah* and *al-sayyiʾah* is suggested to be good and evil speech, respectively. It is also suggested that these two terms mean good and evil deeds, respectively; that is, "a good turn," "a kind act" and "an abominable and detestable act," respectively. These two terms are also suggested to mean good and bad character, respectively, which in turn refer to forbearance (*al-ḥilm*) and hot-tempered impetuosity (*al-jahl*) respectively. The context of the verse favors the last interpretation, and thus the meaning is that they repulse the hurt and harm of the people from themselves by means of patient indulgence, and the meaning of the rest of the verse is clear.

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا اللَّغْوَ أَعْرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَا نَبْتَغِي الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(28:55) ***And when they hear idle talk, they turn aside from it and say: We shall have our deeds and you shall have your deeds. Peace be on you; we do not desire the ignorant.***

The meaning of the word *al-laghw* that occurs in this verse is "idle, nonsensical talk (*laghw al-kalām*)." This understanding is in light of the word's relationship and occurrence alongside the verb *samiʾū* ("they hear"). The meaning (of the initial part of this verse) is "engaging in speech which is inappropriate and unworthy such as gibberish, garrulous talk, insulting speech, and all that which involves crudeness and coarseness." It is for this reason that when the believers from the People of the Book heard such speech, they turned away from it and did not respond to it with its kind; rather they responded with the words: *We shall have our deeds and you shall have your deeds* which refers to a suspension of hostilities. This is while their words, conveyed in *peace be on you* means *you have security and peace from us*, which is also a reference to suspension of hostilities and taking leave or moving away in an honorable and dignified manner just as God says: *And the servants of the Beneficent Allah are they who walk on the earth in humbleness, and when the ignorant address them, they say: Peace* (25:63).

As for their words conveyed in *we do not desire the ignorant*, it means: "We do not desire to associate with them or to have social intercourse with them." This is an affirmation of what has gone before, and it denotes the manner and conduct of the speech of the polytheists such that if the believers from the People of the Book uttered it, then it would amount to responding to evil with evil.

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(28:56) ***You cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases, and He knows best the followers of the right way.***

The meaning of guidance mentioned in this verse is to convey someone

to the desired and intended destination, to convey him to a state where the heart overflows with faith. It is known that this role is reserved for God, and none shares in this role with Him. This does not negate the role of showing, pointing out or indicating the right path since this is part of the responsibility of the divine messenger and there is no reason to negate that for him. The verbal noun *al-ihtidā'* means "accepting true guidance."

Hence, when God describes in the previous verses how the polytheists were deprived of the blessing of guidance while they were a people who belonged to the community of the Prophet, how they had deviated as a result of following their desires, and describes their arrogant attitude towards the truth which was revealed to them, as well as describing the faith of the People of the Book and their acknowledgment and admission of the truth, God then concludes His speech in this section by stating that the matter of guidance rests with God and not with him. God guides these people who do not belong to your community, your community being one to whom you are calling out to and whom you are preaching to. On the other hand, God does not guide these who are from your own people, those whom you would like to accept true guidance, and He knows best the followers of the right way.

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Examining Narrations

(1) It is narrated from the Messenger of God:
God has not destroyed a people, or a generation, or a nation, or the inhabitants of a town by punishment from the heavens ever since He sent down the Torah to the earth, with the exception of the people of the town who were transformed into apes. Have you not seen what God says: *And certainly We gave Moses the Book after We had destroyed the former generations*? (28:43)[1]

Author's comment: This verse is not explicit regarding the discontinuity of divine destruction, especially by means of heavenly punishment, subsequent to the descent of the Torah.

(2) It is narrated from the Messenger of God regarding *And you were not on this side of the mountain when We called* (28:46):

1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bazzār, Ibn al-Mundhir, and al-Ḥākim who authenticated it, and on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī.

When God drew Moses close to Himself at the mountain of al-Ṭūr at Sinai as an intimate friend, Moses asked God: "My Lord, is there one more honorable to You than myself? This is because You drew me near to Yourself as an intimate friend and conversed with me."

God replied: "Yes, Muḥammad is more honorable to Me than yourself."

Moses asked: "If Muḥammad is more honorable to You than me, then is the nation of Muḥammad more honorable to You than the Children of Israel? This is because you cleaved apart the sea for them, saved them from the Pharaoh and his tyranny, and fed them manna and quails."

God replied: "Yes, the nation of Muḥammad is more honorable to Me than the Children of Israel."

Moses said: "My Lord, then show them to me."

God replied: "You shall never see them; however, if you wish I can let you hear their voices," and Moses agreed. Thus God called out: "O nation of Muḥammad, respond to your Lord," and they did so while they were still in the loins of their fathers and the wombs of their mothers, up until the Day of Resurrection. They responded by saying: "Here we are at Your service. You are our true Lord, and we are Your true slaves."

God responded: "You all have said the truth. I am your Lord and you are my slaves in truth. I have forgiven you even before you called Me, and I have granted you your wishes even before you beseeched Me. Thus whoever from among you meets Me with the testimony that there is no God save Allah shall consequently enter paradise."

Ibn ᶜAbbās said: "Thus when God sent forth Muḥammad as a messenger, He intended to bestow favors on him with what He had granted Moses and his nation, and so He said: O Muḥammad, *And you were not on this side of the mountain when We called* (28:46)."[1]

Author's comment: Al-Suyūṭī has also transmitted this via other chains of transmission, while al-Ṣadūq has also transmitted a report in *al-ᶜUyūn* with a similar meaning from Imam al-Riḍāᶜ; however, to interpret and understand the verse in question in light of the meaning suggested

1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh from Ibn ᶜAbbās.

by this report entails causing contextual disruption and disorder in the sentences that occur before and after it, one with the other.

(3) It is narrated from Abū al-Ḥasan [al-Riḍā] regarding *and who is more erring than he who follows his low desires without any guidance from Allah?* (28:50):

It means one who takes his desires as his religion without any guidance from the leaders (Imams) of guidance.[1]

Author's comment: A report similar to this is transmitted in *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt* via his chain of transmission from Muʿallā from Imam al-Ṣādiq. This report, with respect to the interpretation of this verse, needs to be understood from the perspective of the application (*al-jary*) of its meaning to the Imams, or from the perspective that it reflects the verses' inner meaning.

(4) Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548 AH or 1154 CE) says with respect to *[As to] those whom We gave the Book before it, they are believers in it* (28:52):

This verse and the verses that follow were revealed with respect to ʿAbdullāh b. Salām, Tamīm al-Dārī, al-Jārūd, al-ʿAbdī, and Salmān al-Fārisī, and this was when they accepted the faith of Islam, and, consequently, these verses were revealed in their favor. This was the opinion of Qatāda (d. 117 AH or 735 CE). It is also suggested that this verse was revealed in favor of forty Christian men. They had believed in the Prophet before the latter was commissioned to the office of messengership; thirty-two of these were from Ethiopia who accepted the faith at the hands of Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib on his advent there, while eight were from al-Shām. Among them were Baḥīrāʾ, Abraha, Al-Ashraf, Ayman, Idrīs, Nāfiʿ, and Tamīm.[2]

Author's comment: There are reports that transmit different information.

(5) Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī wrote with respect to *and they repel evil with good* (28:54):

It is suggested that they repelled the hot-tempered impetuosity of the hot-tempered, ignorant, and impetuous person with

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1 *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*, via its chain of narration on the authority of Muḥammad ibn Fuḍayl.

2 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*.

forbearance (*al-ḥilm*). This was the opinion of Yaḥyā b. Salām. It means they repelled the harm of the people from themselves by patiently indulging them. A similar explanation has been reported from Imam al-Ṣādiq.[1]

(6) It is related from Abū Hurayra:

When the moment of the death of Abū Ṭālib drew near, the Prophet approached him and said: "O uncle, say: there is no God but Allah, and I shall bear witness to your testimony on the Day of Resurrection."

Abū Ṭālib replied: "If it were not for the fact that the Quraysh would humiliate and taunt me by saying: what led him to testify to that was nothing but the restlessness and disquiet that occurs due to death, then I would confess to that to you." At that, God revealed: *You cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He pleases, and He knows best the followers of the right way* (28:56).[2]

Author's comment: Reports with similar content have been transmitted from Ibn ʿUmar, Ibn al-Musayyab, and others; however, the reports of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt are numerous in number in favor of Abū Ṭālib's faith, while lines of poetry have been transmitted from him which are replete with his testimony in favor of the sincerity of the Prophet and the truth of his religion. He was the one who looked after and accommodated the Prophet during the latter's infancy and supported him after the latter was commissioned to the office of messengership and before his migration to Medina. Thus the effect of Abū Ṭālib's endeavors alone in his quest to safeguard the noble self of the Prophet during the ten years preceding the emigration would equal the effect of the endeavors of the Emigrants and the Helpers altogether during the ten years after the emigration.

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1 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān.*

2 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqi in *al-Dalāʾil.*

Verses 57-75

These verses mention yet another excuse with which the polytheists of Mecca tried to excuse themselves from believing in the book of God, an excuse which these verses subsequently refute. The excuse in these verses comes about after the verses in the previous section had mentioned another excuse of the Meccan polytheists, which was: *They say: Why is he not given the like of what was given to Moses?* (28:48)

The excuse of the Meccan polytheists to the Prophet Muḥammad in these verses is: "If we believed in what your book teaches of guidance, which is the religion of monotheism, then the Arab polytheists shall expel us from our land by means of murder, captivity, plunder, and rendering us bereft of peace and security."

In turn, God responds to their excuse by refuting it, reiterating: "It is We who established a secure sanctuary for the Meccan polytheists, a sanctuary which the Arabs respect and esteem and to which abundant fruits arrive. Thus there is no need for the Meccan polytheists to fear being expelled from Mecca by the Arabs."

In addition to this, the plenitude of wealth and offspring which the Meccan polytheists enjoyed, and their exultation in a life of ease and comfort, did not guarantee for them security and safety from destruction and ruin such that they should prefer these things to obeying and following the guidance. This is because how many a people there were who exulted in their life of ease and comfort but whom God destroyed and eradicated, and subsequently their land passed out of their ownership. Thus there lay their houses which were not inhabited after them save for a few [houses].

Furthermore, that which they preferred to following the guidance was the enjoyment of the temporal life of this world. An intelligent person would not choose it in preference to the eternal life of the hereafter, which lies with God, .

Moreover, the creation and the command belong solely to God. Thus if He chose something and commanded it, it was not for anyone to oppose Him in preference to what his own soul desired and coveted, subsequently choosing what his soul inclined to and desired!

Thereafter, God cites the story of Korah and how He made him and

his house sink into the earth.

وَقَالُوا إِنْ نَتَّبِعِ الْهُدَىٰ مَعَكَ نُتَخَطَّفْ مِنْ أَرْضِنَا ۚ أَوَلَمْ نُمَكِّنْ لَهُمْ
حَرَمًا آمِنًا يُجْبَىٰ إِلَيْهِ ثَمَرَاتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ رِزْقًا مِنْ لَدُنَّا وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ
لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

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(28:57) ***And they say: If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our land. What! Have We not settled them in a safe, sacred territory to which fruits aplenty are drawn? Sustenance from Us, but most of them do not know.***

The verbal noun *al-takhaṭṭuf* means "to steal and swipe something with speed," "to carry away" or "to sweep away something with speed," "to do away something with speed." It is also suggested that the nouns *al-khaṭf* and *al-takhaṭṭufu* mean "to grab or take away" or "to loot and pillage from all directions," "to deprive someone of something from all directions."

The contention made by the polytheists that they would be expelled from their land, was one made in the manner of a figurative speech by which they meant murder, captivity, and the plundering of their wealth and property. This was as if they and what was related to them, with respect to family and wealth, would be snatched and taken away from them and consequently, their land would be rendered bereft of them. The identity of the land mentioned in the phrase "from our land" that occurs in this verse refers to the land of Mecca and its sanctuary. This identification is made on the basis of the words of God which immediately follow the contention: *Have We not settled them in a safe, sacred territory?* This is while those making the statement *If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country* were some of the polytheists of Mecca.

This statement of the Meccan polytheists was made in the form of an excuse by which they wished to avoid belief. The excuse was that if they did believe then the Arabs would expel them from their land, which was the land of Mecca. This was because the Arabs were polytheists and would not tolerate accepting the faith and the rejection of their idols. Thus the statement of the Meccan polytheists was in the form of citing the obstacle responsible for preventing them from accepting the faith. However, their statement in and of itself contained an acknowledgment of the truth of the call and an acknowledgment that the book and what it contained was

the truth. It was just the danger and risk of expulsion which prevented them from accepting the call and believing in it. This is the reason their statement is expressed as follows: *And they say: If we follow the guidance with you* rather than saying "if we follow your book or your religion" or words to that effect.

As for the part of this verse that reads: *What! Have We not settled* (numakkin, from al-tamkīn) *them in a safe, sacred territory…*, it has been suggested that the verbal noun *al-tamkīn* includes "to make or establish something for someone," "to provide something for someone" (*al-jaʿl*). Hence the meaning is: "Did We (that is, God) not make or establish or provide for them a safe, sacred territory, settling them in it?" It has also been suggested that the word *ḥaraman* ("a sacred territory") occurs in this verse in the grammatically accusative case in order to indicate that it is an adverb of place.[1] Therefore the meaning (of this part of the verse) is: "Did We not settle them in a sacred territory"? This is while the word *āminan* ("secure") occurs as an adjective describing and qualifying the word *ḥaraman,* thus conveying the meaning of: "a sacred territory that is safe and secure" or "a safe and secure sacred territory." As for the description of the sacred territory as one that possessed safety and security, while it was its inhabitants who lived in peace and security, this is due to the consideration of the effects of the relational metaphor.[2] This is while this statement in the verse is actually conjoined to an elision, the implication of which is: "Did We not protect and safeguard them and establish for them a sacred territory that is safe and secure, settling them in it?"

This verse is thus the first rebuttal from God to their excuse, which occurs in *if we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country*, where the meaning obtained is: "It is We who settled the Meccan polytheists in a land which We made a sacred territory, one that was safe and secure, and which the Arabs esteemed and revered. Thus there is no

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1 An adverb of place (*ẓarf al-makān*) refers to a noun in the accusative case which clarifies the place where the action of the verb took place. (Trans.)

2 A relational metaphor is one where a thing is metaphorically ascribed a quality that actually pertains to another where the ascription is made due to the relationship that exists between the two things. Thus in this verse the habitation (which is Mecca) is metaphorically described with the quality of safety or security which quality actually pertains to its inhabitants, and that is due to the relationship that exists between the two. (Trans.)

reason for the Meccan polytheists to fear that the polytheist Arabs would expel them from Mecca if they believed."

As for the part of this verse that says *to which fruits aplenty are drawn* (yujbā, from al-jibāya), the verbal noun *al-jibāya* means "to gather," "to assemble," "to collect something as dues" while the word *kull* that occurs here denotes abundance and not generality, and this is because of the certain absence of the meaning of generality intended here. Hence the meaning obtained is that many and abundant fruits of various kinds are gathered or drawn to the sacred territory. This is while this part of the verse occurs as a qualifying description for the sacred territory. This description is employed here due to the possibility that the Meccan polytheists might imagine that they would suffer loss due to the discontinuation of the supplies and provisions if they believed.

A sustenance from Us: The end part of this verse that says *but most of them do not know* occurs in the form of providing additional information regarding all that has been said previously with the aim of removing any ambiguity or confusion, meaning: "It is We (that is, God) who preserved and safeguarded them in peace and security and sustained them with abundant fruits; however most of them are ignorant of all that and instead think that the thing that is protecting them from being expelled by (other) Arabs is their polytheism and their worship of the idols."[1]

وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ بَطِرَتْ مَعِيشَتَهَا ۖ فَتِلْكَ مَسَاكِنُهُمْ لَمْ تُسْكَنْ
مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ۖ وَكُنَّا نَحْنُ الْوَارِثِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(28:58) ***And how many a town have We destroyed which exulted in its means of subsistence, so these are their abodes; they have not been dwelt in after them except for a few, and We are the***

1 The phrase *rizqan min ladunnā* ("a sustenance from Us") occurs either in the grammatical sense of *mafʿūl muṭlaq* (the absolute object) or in the grammatical sense of *al-ḥāl* (denoting the state, condition or circumstance) of the term *thamarāt* ("fruits"). (Auth.)
Mafʿūl muṭlaq is a grammatical term which refers to a verbal noun [*rizqan*] in the accusative case, which comes after the verb (*yujbā*) and is used to add stress or a sense of finality to the meaning of the verb, or to clarify the kind or type of act expressed by the verb or to clarify the number of times the action of the verb occurred. Here, it is the first meaning of stress that is intended if the phrase is considered to be the "absolute object." (Trans.)

inheritors.

The verbal noun *al-baṭr* means "arrogance, insolence, ingratitude, and exultation by reason of or due to material blessings." Hence the meaning is: "How many a town have We destroyed which were arrogant, oppressive, and tyrannical, behaving with conceit *in* their lives?"[1]

So these are their abodes; they have not been dwelt in after them except for a few: This means that their empty and ruined dwellings with their roofs falling in are observable to you before your eyes, subsisting in their ruined state not inhabited or populated after the destruction of their owners save for *a few of the dwellings from them*. Thus it becomes apparent that it is more suitable to interpret the exception phrase *illā qalīlā* ("except for a few") as applying to the phrase *masākinuhim* ("their abodes or dwellings") and not as applying to the phrase *min baʿdihim* ("after them") where the latter application would have the meaning of the houses not being dwelt in after them save for *a short period of time* such as when a traveller passes by for a day or two.[2]

And We are the inheritors means that the original owners who were destroyed owned their dwellings and then abandoned them while none other than God succeeded them, and therefore God inherited their dwellings. This sentence contains a pithy message which is that it is God who is the owner of everything—the true and absolute owner. Thus He is the true and real owner of their dwellings; however, He gave them possession of their dwellings, to own and to control, by allowing them authority over them. Thereafter, He took away their dwellings from them by destroying the rebellious owners while their dwellings continued to remain after the destruction of their owners, but bereft of their owners. Consequently, God named Himself their heir in the sense that He is the Enduring, Everlasting Being after them and He is the owner of that which was in their possession while their control and ownership was nominal and artificial. Thus their ownership and control moved over to God. However, in fact, there was actually no moving over of any control and ownership; rather God's real

1 The word *maʿīsha* is in the accusative case due to the suppression or elision of the preposition. (Auth.)

2 The focus of the first interpretation is on the few houses being inhabited while the focus of the second interpretation is on the short duration of time the houses were inhabited. (Trans.)

and true sovereignty and ownership manifested and asserted itself by the eclipsing and vanishing of their nominal, artificial control and ownership.

This verse is the second rebuttal from God to their excuse cited in the verse: *And they say: If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country* (28:57) where the message intended to be conveyed is: "The mere excuse is your need for the protection of yourselves from being expelled by the Arabs from your land; however, your refusal does not guarantee continuity for you nor does it guarantee for you the protection of your land and your comfortable and easy lives in it as you wish, for how many a people there were who lived lives of excessive ease, joy, and comfort. They exulted in such a life and were vain and arrogant but We destroyed them, and after them their dwellings remained empty and uninhabited, having no one to inherit and take them over save God."

وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ مُهْلِكَ الْقُرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ يَبْعَثَ فِي أُمِّهَا رَسُولًا يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِنَا ۚ وَمَا كُنَّا مُهْلِكِي الْقُرَىٰ إِلَّا وَأَهْلُهَا ظَالِمُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(28:59) ***And your Lord never destroyed towns until He raised in their metropolis a messenger, reciting to them Our communications, and We never destroyed towns unless their people were unjust.***

The possessive construct *umm al-qurā*[1] (literally "mother of towns or villages") refers to the source-town of a number of towns and villages of a certain area—the town that is the biggest of them all, their center and their capital, and the one to which the rest of the satellite towns turn. This verse mentions the divine *modus operandi* with respect to the punishment of the disobedient inhabitants of towns and cities by eradication and extirpation, which is that the punishment by extirpation and by being uprooted does not come forth from God unless two things happen first. First, the inhabitants of the towns and villages are given unarguable proof. This happens by God sending forth to them a messenger who recites divine messages to them and discusses the signs and messages of God with them. Second,

1 This possessive construct—*umm al-qurā*—occurs in this verse slightly differently. It occurs in the genitive case due to the effect on it of the preposition *fī* while the term *al-qurā* occurs by means of the feminine pronominal suffix *-hā*, altogether becoming *fi ummihā.* (Trans.)

those subjected to the punishment first prove themselves tyrannical by rejecting the signs of God and belying the messenger of God.

This verse, which explains and clarifies God's *modus operandi* regarding the destruction of the disobedient inhabitants of towns and villages, and the verse's occurrence in the narrative, coming as it does after the previous verse, is in order to frighten the polytheists of Mecca by pointing out to them that if they persist in their infidelity, they would qualify and be exposed to the punishment of God since God had sent forth a messenger to their central city, which was Mecca, who recited to them and discussed with them the signs and messages of God while they continued to be tyrannical by belying His messenger. In this way, the significance of the play of words in this verse becomes apparent where there is a sudden shift in the rhetorical style of the divine discourse from the previous verses. In the previous verses, God speaks to the Prophet in conversation, talking about Himself in the first person. Then in this verse, God speaks about Himself as if He is absent from the conversation. This is indicated by the part of the verse that says: *And your Lord never destroyed towns until He raised…* The significance of pointing out in this part of the verse that the Meccan polytheists would qualify for divine punishment if they belied the Prophet—since they would have acquired the qualities and conditions deserving of divine punishment—is that it contains a boost to the morale of the Prophet and an affirmation of his conclusive proof. The rhetorical style of the divine discourse shifting again in the latter part of this verse from speaking to the Prophet in the initial part of it as if He was absent from the conversation to that of speaking in the first person again, indicated in *and We never destroyed towns…*, serves to indicate a return to the previous context after having had accomplished the intended purpose.

وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَمَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتُهَا ۚ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ ۚ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(28:60) ***And whatever things you have been given are only an enjoyment of this world's life and its adornment, and whatever is with Allah is better and more lasting; do you not then understand?***

The verbal noun *al-ītāʾ* means "to give," "to grant," "the act of giving (*al-iʿṭāʾ*)," while the phrase *min shayʾin* (literally "of things") that occurs in this verse serves to suggest generality, meaning "everything which you have

been given." The noun *al-matāᶜ* that occurs in this verse means "enjoyment, that by which a person enjoys" while the noun *al-zīna* means "that which is joined to another thing in order to give it beauty and adornment." The phrase *al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* ("the lower or inferior life," "the worldly life") refers to the limited life which will be cut short and which is the closer of the two lives to us, its opposite being the *al-ḥayāt al-ākhira* ("the life hereafter") which is eternal and everlasting. Hence what is meant by the phrase in this verse that says *and whatever is with Allah* refers to the blissful life of the hereafter which is with God and in His proximity and which is therefore considered better and more lasting.

Hence the meaning obtained is: "All the worldly boons and blessings which God has given you serve as enjoyment and adornment by which the life of this world is adorned and embellished, a life which is the closer of the two lives to you; however, it is one that is finite and ever-perishing while what is with God of His rewards in the life here-in-after, which rewards come about due to following and obeying God's guidance, and due to faith in the signs of God, is better and everlasting. Therefore, it is incumbent on you to prefer the latter to the enjoyments and embellishments of this world. Do you not understand?"

This verse is the third rebuttal to their contention cited in *And they say: If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country* (28:57) where the intent is: "Let us suppose that you all did follow the guidance. The result would be that the Arabs would expel you from your land; however, that which you would lose and forfeit is the enjoyment of the life of this world and its transient embellishment! So what is the matter with you that you prefer it to what is with God of the rewards? These are rewards which you would obtain due to following the guidance, while the bliss of the life here-in-after is better and ever-lasting."

أَفَمَنْ وَعَدْنَاهُ وَعْدًا حَسَنًا فَهُوَ لَاقِيهِ كَمَنْ مَتَّعْنَاهُ مَتَاعَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا
ثُمَّ هُوَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ مِنَ الْمُحْضَرِينَ ﴿٦١﴾

(28:61) ***Is he to whom We have promised a goodly promise which he shall meet with, like him whom We have given the enjoyments of this world's life, then on the day of resurrection he shall be of those who are brought up?***

This verse, along with the next seven verses, serves as a clarification of

the content of the previous verse. The message of the previous verse was that following the guidance is better than abandoning it and enjoying the embellishments of the life of this world. However, the clarification in this and the succeeding verses occurs in a different manner. It occurs in the form of a comparison of the state of one who follows the guidance and what such a person will meet of the goodly promise promised to him by God with the state of one who did not follow the guidance and confined himself to enjoying the embellishments of the life of this world. The latter shall face a summons on the Day of Resurrection, while those whom he worshiped shall dissociate themselves from him. They shall not respond to him when he calls out to them, in addition to which he shall witness the punishment and shall be questioned about his response to the call of the messengers. The interrogative in this verse *Is he to whom We have promised a goodly promise which he shall meet* is a rhetorical question which indicates a negation with a tone of rebuke.[1] This is while the goodly promise is the promise of God of forgiveness and paradise as God says in: *Allah has promised to those who believe and do good deeds [that] they shall have forgiveness and a mighty reward* (5:9).

The promise of God is never false as He says: *Now Allah's promise is true, but most of them do not know* (10:55).

The part of this verse which reads *like him whom We have given the enjoyments of this world's life* refers to a person who will be deprived of that goodly promise due to having confined himself to enjoying the embellishments of this world. The evidence in favor of this meaning is the comparison in this verse between the goodly promise and the worldly enjoyment. As for the part of this verse which reads *then on the day of resurrection he shall be of those who are brought up*. It means he shall be summoned for the punishment or for questioning, censure, and reproach while the conjunctive particle *thumma* ("then") which occurs in this part of the verse is in order to effectuate an orderly arrangement in speech and in order to complete this nominal sentence in symmetrical correspondence to the part which reads *which he shall meet with*. The terminating section of this verse—*then on the day of resurrection he shall be of those who are brought up*—is in obverse relationship to the phrase which reads *which he shall meet with*. This is in order to confirm the materialization

1 That is: "No! The two are certainly not alike!" (Trans.)

of what the verse says.[1]

وَيَوْمَ يُنَادِيهِمْ فَيَقُولُ أَيْنَ شُرَكَائِيَ الَّذِينَ كُنْتُمْ تَزْعُمُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

(28:62) ***And on the day when He will call them and say: Where are those whom you claimed to be My associates?***

The term *shurakā'* ("associates") mentioned in this verse refers to those deities which the Meccan polytheists worshiped in this world. The reason the Meccan polytheists considered these deities God's associates and partners was because they granted or ascribed to them certain privileges that properly belong to God such as worship and the management of the universe.[2]

قَالَ الَّذِينَ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقَوْلُ رَبَّنَا هَٰؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ أَغْوَيْنَا أَغْوَيْنَاهُمْ كَمَا غَوَيْنَا ۖ تَبَرَّأْنَا إِلَيْكَ ۖ مَا كَانُوا إِيَّانَا يَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(28:63) ***Those against whom the sentence has become confirmed will say: Our Lord! These are they whom we caused to err; we caused them to err as we ourselves did err; to Thee we declare ourselves to be clear [of them]; it was not us that they worshiped.***

The deities which the polytheists considered associates of God were of two kinds. One kind was that of the honored and revered worshipers and creatures of God such as the angels brought close to God and Jesus

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1 Thus the beginning part of this verse, which begins with the negative interrogative: *Is he to whom We have promised a goodly promise which he shall meet with…* (28:61) corresponds obversely when juxtaposed with the latter part of this verse which reads *like him whom We have given the enjoyments of this world's life, then on the day of resurrection he shall be of those who are brought up?* (28:61). (Trans.)

2 The occurrence of the imperfect tense verb *yunādi* with its pronominal suffix *-him* indicates the polytheists' distance from God in the sense of their having had been forsaken by God on the Day of Resurrection. (Auth.) The sense of distance and of having had been forsaken by God comes across from the use of the verb "to call" since one does not need to call out to one who is near but only to one who is far. Nevertheless, the meaning of "distance" here is metaphorical rather than literal since a literal understanding of spatial distance from God would suggest anthropomorphism, which is denied. (Trans.)

the son of Mary. The other kind was that of the tyrannical and insolent beings such as the jinn and the false claimants to divinity from among humans such as the Pharaoh, Nimrūd and others like them. This is while God has included with the latter all those beings that were followed and obeyed in the path of falsehood such as Satan, Satan's cohorts, and the leaders of misguidance. Thus God said: *Did I not charge you, O children of Adam that you should not serve Satan? Surely he is your open enemy. And that you should serve Me; this is the right way. And certainly, he led astray numerous people from among you. What! Could you not then understand?* (36:60-62); *Have you then considered him who takes his low desire for his Allah…?* (45:23); *They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords besides Allah…* (9:31).

However, *those against whom the sentence has become confirmed* refers to the second category of false deities. This understanding is on the basis of the statement in this verse which describes the false deities as admitting that they had caused others to err, coupled with their statement of dissociation from the worship of those who took them as their deities and worshiped them—namely, the polytheists, even if they were themselves from among those against whom the sentence of damnation was confirmed as the following verse indicates: *But the word [which had gone forth] from Me was just: I will certainly fill hell with the jinn and men together* (32:12).

However, the reference in the verse under discussion is to those who were worshiped and followed—those who were the object of polytheism and responsible for misguidance.

The citation in this verse, of the statement of those who were associated with God in worship despite the verse itself not suggesting that those questioned had pointed out to the former is perhaps due to those questioned having had lost those whom they used to worship and obey at that station as described in: *And on the day when He shall call out to them, Where are [those whom you called] My associates? They shall say: We declare to Thee, none of us is a witness. And away from them shall go what they called upon before* (41:47-48).

With respect to the speech of those who led others astray cited in this verse that reads: *Our Lord! These are they whom we caused to err…*, the plural demonstrative pronoun *hāʾulā* that occurs in this verse ("these") is a reference to the polytheists, that is, it is a reference to *they whom we caused to err…* This speech serves as a preliminary statement to the following one.

The following part of the speech of God says *we caused them to err as we ourselves did err*. It means: "Their error, which was due to us misguiding them, was akin to our own misguidance. Therefore just as we erred by our own free will without being coerced into it so similarly, they erred by their own free will without being coerced into it." One piece of evidence in favor of this understanding is what God relates [from Satan]: *And I had no authority over you, except that I called you and you obeyed me; therefore, do not blame me but blame yourselves*, 14:22). Another example is what God says in the context of narrating the dialogue of the tyrants and their cohorts (on the Day of Resurrection): *And some of them shall advance towards others, questioning each other. They shall say: Surely you used to come to us from the right side. They shall say: Nay, you [yourselves] were not believers. And we had no authority over you, but you were an inordinate people. So the sentence of our Lord has come to pass against us: [now] we shall taste. So we led you astray, for we ourselves were erring* (37:27-32).

This means, "What can possibly reach you from us when we ourselves were lost and misguided, save misguidance?"

From here it becomes clear that there is another meaning to their statement *we caused them to err as we ourselves did err*. The meaning is: *These people acquired the same characteristics as we did, just that we dissociate from them since we did not coerce them into error and misguidance. They did not worship us due to force and coercion* while their statement *to Thee we declare ourselves to be clear [of them]* refers to absolute dissociation since it was not in the power of the former to coerce the latter and to take away their free will.

The speech of those who caused others to err as cited in this verse, which reads *it was not us that they worshiped* means "they never worshiped us by means of coercion" or "we certainly dissociate ourselves or absolve ourselves from their deeds." Therefore, one who absolves himself from a deed does not have it subsequently imputed to him. This is the meaning which the Qur'an refers to in the context of describing this position, such as in: *And that which they forged has passed away from them.* (6:24) *And away from them shall go what they called upon before* (41:48); *And on the day when We will gather them all together, then We will say to those who associated others [with Allah]: Keep where you are, you and your associates; then We shall separate them widely one from another and their associates would say: It was not us that you served* (10:28);

There are other verses (like these); therefore, pay heed!

It is also suggested that the meaning is "we dissociate ourselves from their deeds; they were not worshiping us, but rather they were worshiping their own whims and fancies" or "they were worshiping the satans"; however, such understandings are not devoid of fatuousness![1]

وَقِيلَ ادْعُوا شُرَكَاءَكُمْ فَدَعَوْهُمْ فَلَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا لَهُمْ وَرَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ ۚ لَوْ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(28:64) ***And it will be said: Call your associate-gods. So they will call upon them, but they will not answer them, and they shall see the punishment; would that they had followed the right way!***

The mention of (the plural) term *shurakāʾ* in this verse refers to the deities of the polytheists, which the latter claimed to be the associates of God. This is the reason God attributes the deities in this verse to the polytheists, while the meaning of the imperative *Call your associate-gods* refers to their call to their associate-gods so that the latter may help them and repel from them the punishment of God. This is the reason the speech of God subsequently says *and they [the polytheists] shall see the punishment* (28:64), which comes immediately after *but they [their associate-gods] will not answer them…*

As for the part of this verse that reads *would that they had followed the right way*, it has been suggested that the apodosis of the conditional particle *law* is elided because the speech indicates and points to it. Therefore the implication is: "If only they had followed the right way, *they would have certainly seen the punishment*," meaning they would have certainly believed in the divine punishment as being true.[2] It is also possible that the particle *law* indicates "wish and desire" (*al-tamannī*); that is, it aims

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1 As for *to Thee we declare ourselves to be clear (of them)* (28:63) and *it was not us that they worshiped* (28:63), which occur in reference to *we caused them to err as we ourselves did err* (28:63), these occur with a disconnect or a separation (as if there were full-stops between them) but without a conjunctive or coordinating particle (such as *fa* or *wa* joining them together); however, both are related to the part of this verse that reads *we caused them to err as we ourselves did err* (28:63). (Auth.)

2 See the translator's note under verse 28:10. (Ed.)

to convey the expression of a wish or a desire, meaning thereby "*would that* they had followed the right way."

وَيَوْمَ يُنَادِيهِمْ فَيَقُولُ مَاذَا أَجَبْتُمُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

(28:65) ***And on the day when He shall call them and say: What was the answer you gave to the messengers?***

This verse needs to be understood as conjoined to the verse (28:62), which reads: *And on the day when He will call them and say: Where are those whom you deemed to be My associates?* So firstly, the polytheists were asked about those whom they had associated with God in divinity and were reproachingly asked to seek their help. Secondly, in this verse, they are asked about their answer to the messengers that had been sent to them by and from God. Hence the meaning of this verse is: "What did you say in your reply to the one who was sent to you from among the messengers of God who called out to you in favor of faith and virtuous deeds?"

فَعَمِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَنْبَاءُ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَهُمْ لَا يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(28:66) ***Then the discourse shall become obscure to them on that day, so they shall not ask each other.***

The verbal noun *al-ʿamā* is a figure of speech meaning "rendering a person such that he does not arrive at or obtain news or information or is not guided aright to news or information." What was apparently required was that the quality of *al-ʿamā* ("to become blind or obscure") be attributed to the polytheists and not to the discourse; however, the contrary has taken place here where it is said *Then the discourse shall become obscure to them*. This expression is in order to indicate the polytheists being overwhelmed from all sides [on the Day of Resurrection], the blocking of all paths to them, and the cutting off of all means to them just as it is said elsewhere: *and* (*all*) *their means are cut asunder or voided* (2:166). Thus due to the blocking off or the voiding of all paths and means of influence to them on the day of resurrection, the result would be that the discourse would appear obscure and confused to them and they would not find anything which they could use as an excuse in order to avoid or thwart the divine punishment.

The end part of this verse which reads *so they shall not ask each other* occurs as a concomitant to the obscurity of the discourse by way of

mentioning one concomitant of the general phrase mentioned at the beginning of the verse, which is the obscurity of the discourse. Hence the meaning is: "They will not be able to ask or consult each other so that they may come up with an excuse which they could use in defence of their belying the messengers and rejecting their call." The beginning and the end part of this verse have been given many diverse interpretations which are futile to present here; we considered ignoring them to be better.

فَأَمَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَعَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُفْلِحِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(28:67) ***But as to him who repents and believes and does good, maybe he will be among the successful.***

It means that the sorry description mentioned in the foregoing verses applies to those who disbelieved and did not turn repentantly to God ; however, as for one who did turn repentantly to God, believed in Him, and did virtuous deeds, it is hoped that he will be among the successful ones. The verb of anticipation *ʿasā* that occurs here is suggested to have the meaning of "the certain actualization and attainment (of that which is hoped for)" according to the custom and habit of the noble people (while God is the noblest of all beings), or it suggests hope and anticipation in favor of something from the repentant person. Hence the meaning is: "Let such a person anticipate and expect salvation or success."

وَرَبُّكَ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيَخْتَارُ ۗ مَا كَانَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ ۚ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(28:68) ***And your Lord creates and chooses what He pleases; to choose is not theirs. Glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above what they associate [with Him].***

The word *al-khiyara* ("to choose") has the meaning of the verbal noun *al-takhayyur* ("to choose," "to select," "to pick"), just as the word *al-ṭiyara* ("evil omen," "foreboding") has the meaning of the verbal noun *al-taṭayyur* ("to see an evil omen," "to augur evil").

This verse serves as the fourth rebuttal to the speech of the Meccan polytheists cited in: *And they say: If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country* (28:57). What it contains is an incisive argument and proof. The explanation for this is as follows: the act of

creation which refers to making, originating, and founding something belongs solely to God, just as He said in: *Allah is the Creator of everything* (39:62). Thus there is no influencing or effectuating being in existence, in the real sense of the word, other than God. Hence there is nothing that can coerce God to an act. This is because such a supposed thing is either God's creature or is not God's creature. If such a supposed thing is God's creature it means the granting of the grace of existence to it originated from God and is traceable to Him whereby the creature's very existence and the effects of its existence are traceable to God. In such a case there is no meaning in saying that such a thing can have an effect or an influence on God or that what it does or effectuates can have an effect or influence on God. The alternative scenario is that such a supposed thing is not God's creature and God has not granted it the grace of existence while it can influence God by force and coercion; however, that is impossible since there is no greater influencing and effectuating being in existence other than God, nor is there anything whose existence cannot be traced back to God. Thus nothing has an effect or influence on Him, nor can anything prevent Him from effectuating something, just as He says: *And Allah pronounces a doom—there is no repeller of His decree* (13:41); *And Allah is the master of His affair, but most people do not know* (12:21).

Since there is no powerful being that can coerce God to do something, nor is there a being powerful enough to stop God from doing something, then He is free to do what He wishes in the true and real sense of the word "free"! This is with respect to matters of creation; however, the same holds true for matters related to legislation of rules and regulations. This is because the reality of legislation is that God created human beings on a nature which does not become righteous save by accomplishing or executing matters which are obligatory and accomplishing those matters that are similar to it or fall within its purview, as well as refraining from matters that are prohibited as well as refraining from those matters that are similar to it or fall within its purview. Hence, that which a human being benefits from in his quest for perfection and happiness is what God has commanded and charged him with while that which harms him is what God has forbidden him from and cautioned him against.

Thus the prerogative to choose whatever He wills, at the level of the legislation of rules and regulations, belongs to God just as it belongs to Him to choose whatever He wills at the level of creation, planning, and

measurement. This is the meaning of His speech in this verse that reads: *And your Lord creates and chooses what He pleases* which applies to Him absolutely.

It is clear that the part of this verse which reads *And your Lord creates…what He pleases* refers to His unrestricted choice in creation, while the significance of His unrestricted and absolute freedom to create is that His power does not fail in creating anything while nothing prevents Him from what He pleases. In other words, nothing restrains or inhibits His will, neither by itself and nor by means of an inhibiting factor which could prevent Him. This is the freedom to choose in the real sense of the word. As for the part of this verse that says *And your Lord… chooses what He pleases*, this refers to His free choice in the realm of moral legislation where the joining of the word "chooses" (*yakhtār*) to the word "creates" (*yakhluqu*) in this verse is a case of joining the effect to its cause since legislation and morals follow from and are subsequent to creation.

It may be possible to interpret the part of this verse that says *And your Lord creates… what He pleases* as referring to freedom in creation, and to interpret the part of the verse that says *And your Lord… chooses what He pleases* to have a meaning that is broader in scope to moral legislation; however, the first interpretation is better. The evidence for such a preference in interpretation is that the negation that immediately follows in this verse, *to choose is not theirs*, refers to legislative moral choices, while the establishment of choice for God in this verse, *And your Lord… chooses what He pleases*, is in the form of a contrasting juxtaposition. Hence the meaning intended to be conveyed is the affirmation of legislative moral choice for God and its negation for human beings.

Thereafter, there is no doubt that a human being possesses free will with respect to the actions that he carries out by his knowledge and volition even though he is not absolutely free. This is because external causes and factors have a bearing and an effect on his acts. So for example if he takes a morsel of food, that taking of the morsel of food is contingent on the availability of the morsel of food in the external world as well as his appetite for it, its agreeableness to him, its suitability for him, its proximity to him, and the availability and support of the means of taking, holding, chewing, and swallowing the food as well as a myriad of other factors. Therefore, the occurrence of a person's free act is contingent on the availability of external factors and causes which have a bearing on

the materialization of his act, while God is at the very apex of all these different causes and factors, and everything terminates at Him. He is the One who created the human being characterized by the attribute of free will and granted him choice just as He granted him creation, nature, and a character.

Thereafter the human being undoubtedly sees himself free with respect to the moral laws in the sense of intending to carry out an act or leaving it by his volition. Thus it rests with him to do what he wishes or to leave what he wishes without there being anyone from his kind coercing him in favor of something or preventing him from something. This is because all of them are similar to him, neither exceeding him in anything with respect to their state of being human beings nor exercising control over him. This is the meaning of the human being, being essentially free.

Thus the human being is a creature possessing volition and is essentially free unless he, of himself, allows another to possess and take control of his self, thereby consciously divesting himself of his freedom. An example is the human being living in civil society who divests himself of his personal freedom in favor of binding himself to the social legislations, norms, and customs prevalent in that society. This he does by entering into such a society and integrating into it, executing the laws and customs that apply there, desiring thereby to be accepted as a bona-fide member of such a civil society. This is irrespective of whether such laws and norms relate to religion or to society. Another example is that of two fighters who agree to assign to each other their selves if defeated in a fight. Consequently, the victor has the right to do whatever he desires with the one he vanquishes. This is similar to the employee who sells his work and hires himself out to his employer. In such a case he is no longer free with respect to his work since the state of being owned and that of being free do not combine with each other.

Therefore the human being with respect to all members of his species is free in his acts and possesses volition in his deeds unless he divests himself of something of his freedom, by his own free will, and allows another to take control of it. This is while God owns and possesses the human being in his self and with respect to his acts which he carries out—an ownership that is absolute and which is by means of His creative and legislative control and ownership. Consequently, the human being has no choice or freedom with respect to what God wants of him with respect to

legal commands or prohibitions just as the human being has no choice or freedom with respect to what God wishes or intends for him with His creative will. Therefore this is the meaning of this part of this verse: *to choose is not theirs*. This means they have no choice if God chooses something for them with respect to performing a deed or abandoning it such that they may choose for themselves what they wish and want. This is even if what God has chosen is disagreeable to them. Thus this verse is very close in meaning to: *And it behooves not a believing man and a believing woman that they should have any choice in their matter when Allah and His Messenger have decided a matter* (33:36). However, others have offered varying explanations for this verse which lack credibility, and as a result we have ignored them. Those who wish to know of them may refer to the relevant extensive literature.

The part of this verse that reads *glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above what they associate [with Him]* means that God is exalted and far above their association of the idols with Him—idols which they associate with God by their own free will, and which they worship as divine deities to the exclusion of God.

Here, there is another meaning to this speech that is more subtle and nuanced, which is: God is far exalted and far above their polytheism which includes the claim that they have a say and a choice with regards to accepting or rejecting what God has chosen. Choice in this sense is not complete or possible unless it is coupled with a claim to independence from God in existence, and a claim of being able to do without God, nor does it become complete save when another being is associated with God in His divinity and godhead.

The part of this verse that says *and your Lord creates* contains a shift in the rhetorical style of the divine discourse from the previous verse since here God speaks of Himself as if He is absent from the conversation. The significance of this is affirmation and support for the Prophet and a boost to his morale in the sense of strengthening his will and appeasing him. This is accomplished by appending the noun *al-rabb* to the *-ka*. The meaning therefore is: what God has sent forth of the command by the Prophet's agency has already gone forth and is not subject to rejection. Thus they have no choice in accepting or rejecting it, and this is despite not accepting His Lordship.

The speech of God in this verse that says *glory be to Allah* is in the

form of making explicit that which is implicit. The significance of these words is to attribute the matter to God's transcendent being, which is the origin of everything. This is in order to emphasize the transcendence and exaltedness of God's being from all that which does not behoove His sacred being for He is characterized with utmost perfection and is deemed far beyond all defects, and this is because He is God.

وَرَبُّكَ يَعْلَمُ مَا تُكِنُّ صُدُورُهُمْ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(28:69) ***And your Lord knows what their breasts conceal and what they manifest.***

The verbal noun *al-iknān* means "to conceal and to hide" just as the verbal noun *al-iʾlān* means "to make manifest, to reveal, to bring into the open." The reason the act of hiding and concealing is attributed to the hearts is that hearts are considered repositories of secrets while the act of making manifest is attributed to the selves.

Perhaps the reason this verse comes after the one before it is in order to indicate that when God chose for them what He did choose, He did so due to His knowledge of what was in their outer and in their inner of the filth of polytheism and disobedience, and therefore He purified them from that by His wisdom.

وَهُوَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۖ لَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْأُولَىٰ وَالْآخِرَةِ ۖ وَلَهُ الْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(28:70) ***And He is Allah; there is no Allah but He! All praise is due to Him in this [life] and the hereafter, and His is the judgment, and to Him you shall be brought back.***

What comes across from the apparent context of this verse is that the pronoun *huwa* ("He") at the beginning of this verse refers to the phrase "your Lord" that occurs in the previous verse and it is clear from this that the letter *lām* that forms part of God's name "Allah,"[1] is in order to

1 This actually consists of the combination of the definite particle *al-* and the noun *ilāh* thereby becoming *al-ilāh*, the initial *hamza* ("*i*")—of *ilāh* subsequently being dropped due to frequent use, making the entire construction *Allāh*. (Trans.)

indicate the meaning of the description, while the part of the verse that reads *there is no Allah but He* is in order to confirm and emphasize the restriction understood from His speech *and He is Allah*. This is as if it were said: "And He is the God, characterized and uniquely distinguished by divinity and godhead, and there is no god but He."

Hence this verse serves as a complement to the meaning of the previous verse as if it were said: "God, has the freedom to choose for them that they should worship Him alone. He knows their outer and their inner and so, therefore, it is for Him to decree for them that they should worship Him alone. He is the God, singularly worthy and deserving of worship, and consequently, it is incumbent on them to worship Him alone." This is while what is mentioned in the remaining part of this verse, beginning from *All praise is due to Him in this [life] and the hereafter, and His is the judgment, and to Him you shall be brought back* consists of three aspects which draw attention to God as being as "the One worshiped and singularly deserving of worship."

As for the part of this verse that says: *All praise is due to Him in this [life] and the hereafter*, it can be elaborated as follows:

Premise 1. Every perfection that exists in the world and the hereafter is a blessing and a boon from God due to which He deserves the best of praise.

Premise 1. Every beautiful and excellent thing from these blessings and boons granted by God comes forth from the perfection of His being which is from the attributes of His essence due to which He deserves all praise.

Premise 3. Anything, apart from Him, that uniquely possesses a praiseworthy attribute due to which it is praised and extolled, is an attribute that is ultimately traced back to God.

Premise 4. Worship is a form of praise and extolment either by speech or by act.

Conclusion. God is the being singularly worthy of worship.

And His is the judgment means that since God is the absolute master and owner of everything such that no one owns anything without Him making him its master and owner and investing it with ownership, therefore He continues to be the master and owner of all that the others own, and He is the master at the level of legislation as He is the master at the level of creation. Consequently, it is from the corollary of His ownership and control that He decides and decrees for His slaves and for all that He

owns that they should not worship save Him.

As for the speech of God that reads *and to Him you shall be brought back*, it means that (a) since the return is for the purpose of reckoning and reward and (b) since He is the One to whom the return is made and consequently He is the reckoner and the rewarder, and (c) since He is the singular reckoner and rewarder and to Him alone belongs the religion, it is incumbent that He alone be worshiped.

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ اللَّيْلَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَٰهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِضِيَاءٍ ۖ أَفَلَا تَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

(28:71) ***Say: Tell me, if Allah were to make the night to continue incessantly on you till the day of resurrection, who is the Allah besides Allah that could bring you light? Do you not then hear?***

Some say that the word *al-sarmad* that occurs in this verse comes from a four-letter root, *s-r-m-d*, and means "endless," "eternal." However, some say that *al-sarmad* is derived from the noun *al-sard* and that the letter *mīm* has been added to it. In the latter case, the meaning of this word refers to something that occurs in a uniform continuous manner, endlessly; something that goes on perpetually. In this verse, it qualifies the word "night," and the reason this word is applied to the night up until the Day of Resurrection is that there is no night after the Day of Resurrection. As for the part of this verse that reads *who is the Allah besides Allah that could bring you light?*, it means: "Which god is there who can defy the decision of God and bring you light by which you may seek illumination and endeavor to go about seeking livelihood?" This is the meaning that the context of this verse attests to, and it is similar to the argument that occurs in the following verse which reads: *Say: …who is the Allah besides Allah that could bring you the night in which you take rest? Do you not then see*? (28:72)

This resolves the problem adduced in these two verses (28:71-72), which is: if it is supposed that perpetual night till the Day of Resurrection is realized, then the bringing forth of light is completely inconceivable. This is because the one who can bring forth light is either God or a being other than Him; however, the incapability of the latter in bringing forth light is manifestly clear. As for God, then for Him to bring forth light would require combining light and day at the same time, which is impossible

while impossibility has no relation with God's power and will. The same argument would stand true if the day were made to exist perpetually.

Perhaps this may be responded to by saying that the meaning of the part of the verse that says: *Say: Tell me, if Allah were to make the night to continue incessantly on you* means "if God intended to make the night continue perpetually over you," but it is as you can see.

The context seems to require that this verse should have said: "If God were to make the night to continue perpetually on you till the Day of Resurrection, who is the god besides Allah that could bring you *day*?" This is on the basis of the requirement of the context which is that of opposition, where night and day need to be juxtaposed in these verses; however, the comparison with light instead of day is from the perspective of the necessity, with respect to proof, of suggesting the easiest requirement, so that the falsity of the opposing claimant may become manifestly clear with the most complete manifestation. This is as if it were said: "If there were a god other than God who managed the universe, and if God had made the night perpetual while the other god was capable of bringing forth day then come, we have lowered the bar or the challenge. So let the other god bring forth light by which you may seek illumination; however, nothing has the power to do that since the entirety of power rests with God ."

The same argument is however not made in the next verse with respect to night such that it may be argued "who is the god other than Allah who can bring you darkness…?" This is because the thing brought forth is either darkness that is insufficient for rest or it is extensive darkness, in which case it is night.

The term for light in this verse (*ḍiyāʾ*) occurs in the indefinite form. Thus the indefinite form gives further credence to the perspective mentioned above. The scholars have mentioned many other perspectives which are not devoid of arbitrariness. As for the refrain in this verse that says *Do you not then hear*?, it refers to a hearing that involves reflection and understanding so that they may ponder and realize that there is no God other than God.

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ النَّهَارَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَٰهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِلَيْلٍ تَسْكُنُونَ فِيهِ ۖ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

(28:72) ***Say: Tell me, if Allah were to make the day to continue***

incessantly on you till the day of resurrection, who is the Allah besides Allah that could bring you the night in which you take rest? Do you not then see?

The latter part of the verse that speaks of rest during the night means relaxing during it in order to recover from the tiredness and exertion that afflicts a person during the daytime as she endeavors to earn a livelihood. The refrain *Do you not then see*? refers to a sight that involves understanding and recollection, for if they did not see and hear, then it means that they were blind and deaf. It is beautiful that both verses end with the refrain *Do you not then hear*? (28:71) and *Do you not then see*? (28:72), and perhaps the verse which mentions perpetual daytime is specified with sight because of the appropriateness of coupling the light of day with sight while hearing remains for the verse that mentions perpetual night-time, a relationship which is also not devoid of appropriateness.

وَمِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

(28:73) ***And out of His mercy, He has made for you the night and the day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek of His grace, and that you may give thanks.***

This verse occurs in the form of a conclusion to the proof mentioned in the previous two verses. It is brought about after the nullification of the claim of the opponent in the form of initial information due to the indubitable truth and soundness of the content of the verse. Hence the meaning is: "God has made for you the night for the benefit of or for the sake of your relaxation, or, so that you may relax in it."[1] As for the speech of God that says *and that you may seek of His grace…*, it means: "God established the day for you so that you may seek His grace in it which is His gift to you." Hence the reference of the two phrases *that you may rest*

1 The phrase in this verse that says *li-taskunū fīhi* (that you may rest therein, 28:73) has the letter *lām* in it. This letter *lām* is known as *lām al-taʿlīl* [which serves to indicate that the speech following the particle explains the reason, purpose, and justification for the speech that preceded it], while the pronoun *-hi* which is suffixed to the preposition *fī* refers to the night. (Auth.)

therein and *and that you may seek of His grace* (28:73) to the night and day respectively is by way of a successive winding and diffusing of the two phrases in relation to the day and night while the sentence *and that you may give thanks* is with respect to appreciating both the day and night.

As the very beginning of this verse that reads *And out of His mercy He has made for you*, it means: "God has made all that for you, which is a mercy from Him to you." This contains an indication that the creation of such things as rest and seeking God's grace and the creation of laws—which are for mankind's guidance towards gratitude—all of this is from the effects of the attribute of His mercy. Understand that!

وَيَوْمَ يُنَادِيهِمْ فَيَقُولُ أَيْنَ شُرَكَائِيَ الَّذِينَ كُنْتُمْ تَزْعُمُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

(28:74) ***And on the day when He shall call them and say: Where are those whom you deemed to be My associates?***

The explanation for this verse has already been made previously while this verse has been repeated here because the next verse needs the meaning and content of this verse.

وَنَزَعْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا فَقُلْنَا هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ فَعَلِمُوا أَنَّ الْحَقَّ لِلَّهِ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

(28:75) ***And We will draw forth from among every nation a witness and say: Bring your proof; then shall they know that the truth is Allah's, and that which they forged shall depart from them.***

This verse manifests the falsity of the claim of the polytheists regarding their associate-gods. This will take place on the Day of Resurrection, while the term "witness" (*al-shahīd*) that occurs in this verse refers to the witness of deeds as has been repeatedly pointed out before. The verse, however, does not specify the identity of the "witness" as referring to the prophet sent to a particular community as an instance of such a witness. The verse mentions the word *umma* ("nation") because the term *umma* refers to a group of people although there is no indication or textual evidence in the verse suggesting the group being one to which a prophet is sent even if such a group is an instance of this verse. The imperative in *And We will…say: Bring your proof…* means: "We shall challenge and demand of the polytheists to bring forth a decisive proof in favor of what

they claimed, *which* was that God has associates."

Then shall they know that the truth is Allah's, and that which they forged shall depart from them: This means their false claim will disappear from them, which was the claim that God had associates, and they shall know that the truth with respect to divinity is that it solely belongs to God. Therefore the meaning of the verb *ḍalla* that occurs here is in reference to "that which they had forged." This verb means "to go missing," "to vanish," "to disappear," "to depart." This verb is used here figuratively and means: "that which they had forged shall go missing or shall disappear." This is how they (that is, the scholars) have explained it in which case the latter part of this speech contains an instance of the reversal of clauses (*al-taqdīm wa al-taʾkhīr*) such that the penultimate sentence should have followed the ultimate sentence. Hence, the latter part of this verse should read: *that which they forged shall depart from them and then shall they know that the truth is Allah's.*

That the truth is Allah's is akin to what is said in the case of a judgment made in the event of two quarreling factions who bring one another before a judge regarding a right which each claims for itself. This is as if God was contending with the polytheists when they claimed that divinity, in the sense of worship, is a right for their associate-gods while God claimed it to be His right. Consequently, He demands proof of them in favor of their claim at which point their proof will be lost to them and then they would know that the truth lies with God. Thus divinity is a right established and there is no doubt in it. Consequently, if it is not a right for other than God then it is a right for God alone.

This is a meaning that is apparently acceptable, plausible, and good; however, the reality that the speech of God offers here, especially with regards to the Day of Resurrection, is that the day of resurrection will be a day solely devoted to the manifestation of the truth, a manifestation that is witnessed without being veiled. Consequently every falsity due to which a matter was unclear and the truth was ambiguous will be removed. A necessary corollary of this is that the matter of divinity will become apparent and clearly manifest without any ambiguity such that the fabrication of the polytheists will certainly be removed as a consequence of it and not that the proof will be lost to the polytheists, and therefore the unity of God along with His divinity will consequently be concluded by way of intellectual or rational arguments. So take note!

Consequently the contention made in light of the previous perspective, which was that the meaning obtained from the text is that they have no intellectual or rational proof for their claim and therefore there is no requirement for the delay in their knowledge that the truth is solely for God until the Day of Resurrection, is refuted. Secondly, the matter of the reversal of clauses mentioned earlier is refuted and does not have any apparent significance save an appeal to the rhetorical style of *saj*ᶜ.

It is possible that the word *al-ḥaqq* that occurs in *then shall they know that the truth* (al-ḥaqq) *is Allah's* is a verbal noun, in which case the meaning of the sentence is similar to *and they shall know that Allah is the evident Truth* (24:25). Thus the meaning of the truth being for God means that God is the Truth Himself if what is meant is that the truth is analogous with His very essence. Or, it could mean that the truth terminates with Him and is upheld and subsists by Him, if what is meant is that the truth is other than God, as God says in (*This is] the truth from your Lord* (3:60), whereas He did not say the truth is "with your Lord."

Examining Narrations

(1) ᶜAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī relates with respect to *And they say: If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country…* (28:57):

This verse was revealed with respect to the Quraysh. This was when the Messenger of God called them to the faith of Islam and to migrate. They responded: "If we follow the guidance with you we shall be expelled from our country," whereupon God said *What! Have We not settled them in a safe, sacred territory to which fruits aplenty are drawn? Sustenance from Us, but most of them do not know* (28:57).[1]

Author's comment: A tradition with this self-same meaning has been transmitted in *Kashf al-Maḥajja* and in *Rawḍat al-Wāʿiẓīn* while al-Suyūṭī has transmitted it in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh from Ibn ᶜAbbās.

(2) It is narrated from Ibn ᶜAbbās:

Al-Ḥārith ibn ᶜĀmir ibn Nawfil said: "If we follow the guidance

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī.*

with you, we shall be carried off from our country."[1]

(3) It is related from ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī with respect to *And your Lord creates and chooses what He pleases. To choose is not theirs* (28:68):

God chooses the divine leader (*imām*) while it is not the people's prerogative to choose (the divine leader).[2]

Author's comment: This quote is an instance of the application (*al-jary*) of the verse's meaning to a valid instance of it. This is on the basis of the necessity of the appointment of an infallible divine leader by God just like His appointment of the prophet. An elaboration of this principle has already been made.

(4) ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī relates with respect to *And We will draw forth from among every nation a witness…* (28:75):

It means We shall draw forth a divine leader (Imam) from this nation.[3]

Author's comment: This quote is an instance of the application (*al-jary*) of the verse's meaning to a valid instance of it (which in this case relates to the drawing forth of the Imam).

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1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of al-Nasāʾi and Ibn al-Mundhir.

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī.*

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī.*

Verses 76-84

This selection of verses contains the story of Korah (Qārūn) who was one of the Children of Israel. God relates his story after relating the excuse of the polytheists, which was *And they say: If we follow the guidance with you, we shall be carried off from our country* (28:57), to which He responded with several rebuttals, as mentioned and discussed in the previous section. The reason God relates the story of Korah is so that the polytheists might consider his actions and fate carefully since his condition resembled their condition. His condition of disbelief in God and ingratitude towards Him led him to a sad and evil outcome. Thus the purpose was to convey the message to the polytheists that they needed to beware lest what befell him should befall them too. This is because God had granted Korah treasures which were such that their keys would weigh down a company of strong men. Consequently, he thought that his acquisition and accumulation of treasures was due solely to his own knowledge, intellectual merit, and good planning and that therefore he alone was responsible for his successes and achievements. As a result, he felt safe and secure from God's punishment and preferred the life of this world to the life of the hereafter. He sought to work mischief on the earth, and as a result, God made him and his house sink into the earth. Then, there was no group that could help him against God, nor was he able to prevail or triumph.

إِنَّ قَارُونَ كَانَ مِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَىٰ فَبَغَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ۖ وَآتَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْكُنُوزِ مَا إِنَّ مَفَاتِحَهُ لَتَنُوءُ بِالْعُصْبَةِ أُولِي الْقُوَّةِ إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ قَوْمُهُ لَا تَفْرَحْ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفَرِحِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾

(28:76) ***Surely Korah* (Qārūn)** ***was of the people of Moses, but he rebelled against them, and We had given him treasures so much so that their keys would certainly weigh down a company of men possessed of great strength. When his people said to him: Do not exult; Allah does not love the exultant.***

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

> The verbal noun *al-baghyu* means "to seek or to desire to be unjustly high-handed and haughty"; "to be tyrannical"; "to infringe the rights of others"; "to wrong someone." […] *Al-mafātiḥ* is the plural of *maftaḥ* or *miftaḥ*, while *al-mafātīḥ* is the plural of the term *miftāḥ*. The meaning of both terms is the same, which is "an instrument with which locks are opened; a key." […] The verb *nāʾa* with its attendant preposition *bi-* means "to fall down," "to sink," "to collapse" or "to succumb to something while attempting to get up with it." Its imperfect tense verb is *yanūʾu* while its verbal noun is *nawāʾan*. Hence it means "to raise or lift something despite its heaviness"; "to bear a burden with difficulty."

Other sources have defined this verb to mean "something weighing down another thing till the former makes the latter tilt, slant or incline due to the weight." Hence the sentence *nāʾa bihi al-ḥamlu* would translate as "the weight or the heavy thing that was carried weighed down on the person carrying it since it overburdened him thereby making him incline and tilt with it." This latter definition is more suitable and appropriate for this verse.

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

> *Al-ʿuṣba* means "a group or a band of people who are physically intertwined with each other or are physically bound and joined to each other for the sake of cooperation and collaboration in or for a particular task." Different numbers have been suggested as constituting such a band or group of people who make up a *ʿuṣba,* ranging from ten individuals to fifteen individuals. This was the opinion of Mujāhid. On the other hand, Qatāda opined that a *ʿuṣba* constituted of between ten and forty people while Abū Ṣāliḥ was of the opinion that the appropriate number was forty men.[1] Ibn ʿAbbās on the other hand favored a number of three to ten people. It is also suggested that the term in question refers to a band of people who are prejudiced and biased in favor of each other.

The response of Joseph's brothers reported in 12:8 which reads: *we are a company* (ʿuṣba) where they were nine individuals in number proves the spuriousness of the opinions other than the ultimate and penultimate

1 In the Qur'an commentary *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, however, he is reported to have suggested the figure seventy. (Auth.)

ones.

Hence the meaning of this verse is that Korah was from the Children of Israel. He sought to be haughty, impertinent, unjust and tyrannical towards them. We had granted him of treasures which were such that their keys would prove a heavy burden for a strong group of people, weighing them down. On the other hand, a group of Qur'an commentators has interpreted the plural term *al-mafātiḥ* as *al-khazā'in*, meaning "chests or coffers of treasures"; however, that is incorrect.

When his people said to him: Do not exult (lā tafraḥ, from al-farḥ)*; Allah does not love the exultant* (al-fariḥīn): The words *al-farḥ* and *al-fariḥīn* have been explained to mean: "to exult by reason of wealth and to behave with pride, conceit, and ingratitude due to God's favors." This is a necessary corollary of excessive joy and happiness due to worldly wealth since it has an intense connection with the life of this world which makes a person forget the hereafter and bequeaths exuberant joy and exulted conceit on him. It is for this reason that God said: *nor be exultant* (lā tafraḥū) *at what He has given you, and Allah does not love any arrogant boaster* (57:23). Similarly, the prohibition of such exultation (*al-farḥ*) has been understood and justified in this verse under discussion, where it reads *Allah does not love the exultant…*

وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ ۖ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا ۖ وَأَحْسِنْ كَمَا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ ۖ وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفَسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٧٧﴾

(28:77) ***And seek by means of what Allah has given you the future abode, and do not neglect your portion of this world, and do good [to others] as Allah has done good to you, and do not seek to make mischief in the land; Allah does not love the mischief-makers.***

The part of this verse that says *And seek by means of what Allah has given you the future abode* means: "Seek to prepare the abode of the hereafter by means of what God has given you of wealth by spending it in God's service. Furthermore, spend it in areas and places wherein lies God's pleasure and satisfaction."

As for the part of this verse that reads *and do not neglect your portion of this world*, it means: "Do not abandon what God has allocated or

apportioned for you of the life of this world nor abandon your sustenance in it as if you have forgotten it. In addition to this, strive in this world for your hereafter." This is because the reality of the human being's share of the world is that he strives to do good in it for the sake of his hereafter since that is what shall remain and abide for him forever. Another meaning suggested is: "Do not forget that your share of the world—even if you are successful and prosperous in it—is only a little bit of what you have been given. This is what you eat of it, drink of it, and use of it as clothing while the rest is a grace which you shall leave behind for another. Therefore take from it what suffices you and do good to others by means of this grace that is a surplus." This perspective is very good. There are other perspectives and explanations for this part of the verse which however do not correlate with the context of the verse. As for the part of this verse that reads *and do good [to others] as Allah has done good to you*, it means: "Spend your wealth for others in the spirit of kindness and benevolence just as God has given it to you in kindness and benevolence without yourself deserving or requiring it," in which case this sentence occurs as an explanatory addition to the previous sentence which is *and do not neglect your portion of this world*, on the basis of the first of the two perspectives mentioned above and as a complementary sentence on the basis of the second of the two perspectives mentioned above.

The part of this verse that reads *and do not seek to make mischief in the land; Allah does not love the mischief-makers* means: "Do not seek to work mischief in the land by making use of what God has given you of wealth, nor seek to work mischief in the land by means of what you have achieved of high rank, superiority, and influence by this wealth. This is because God does not love those who work mischief and spread corruption, and that is because the basis of creation rests on goodness and reform."

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيتُهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ عِنْدِي ۚ أَوَلَمْ يَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَهْلَكَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ
مِنَ الْقُرُونِ مَنْ هُوَ أَشَدُّ مِنْهُ قُوَّةً وَأَكْثَرُ جَمْعًا ۚ وَلَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْ ذُنُوبِهِمُ
الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

(28:78) ***He said: I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have. Did he not know that Allah had destroyed before him of the generations those who were mightier in strength than he and greater in assemblage? And the guilty shall not be***

asked about their faults.

There is no doubt that the statement *He said: I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have* is Korah's response to the advice and exhortations that the believers made to him. Their advice was based on the argument that his wealth was what God had granted him due to His kindness and benevolence and as a grace and favor from Himself and not because he deserved it or was worthy of it. Therefore it was imperative for him to seek the abode of the hereafter and to do good to the people with his wealth rather than to work mischief in the land by being arrogant, haughty, and exulting.

However he argued that he was not given his wealth as kindness and as benevolence from God; rather, he claimed that he was granted wealth because he merited and deserved it due to the knowledge that he had of how to acquire wealth and how to manage it—knowledge which was not available to others. Consequently, if his wealth was due to his meriting and deserving it then he had an independent right to it. It was his prerogative to do whatever he wanted with his wealth and to spend it however and wherever he wished in order to enjoy different kinds of comforts, to extend his authority and power, and to fulfil his hopes and desires.

This claim of Korah, which was one with which Korah was tried and tested and which ultimately led to his ruin and destruction—that is, the claim that the factor which was responsible for his acquiring treasures and obtaining power was his personal and intellectual genius and nothing else—is a claim that is common among the people of the world. Not one of them thinks that what he possesses of dignity, might, and temporal power is what divine providence and the coming together of beneficial circumstances and factors has brought to him; rather he believes that it is his own self which was the effective cause responsible for it; that it was his own knowledge that led him to it and that it was his own competence and experience which led him to take advantage of opportunities and achieve and secure his destiny.

God refers to this widely prevalent attitude among humanity and humanity's essential confidence in it in the following verses: *So when harm afflicts a man he calls upon Us; then, when We give him a favor from Us, he says: I have been given it only by means of knowledge. Nay, it is a trial, but most of them do not know. Those before them did say it indeed, but what they earned availed them not. So there befell them the evil [consequences]*

of what they earned; and [as for] those who are unjust from among these, there shall befall them the evil [consequences] of what they earn, and they shall not escape. Do they not know that Allah makes ample the means of subsistence to whom He pleases, and He straitens; most surely there are signs in this for a people who believe? (39:49-52); *Have they not then journeyed in the land and seen how the end of those before them was? They were more [in numbers] than these and greater in strength and in fortifications in the land, but what they earned did not avail them. Then when their messengers came to them with clear arguments, they exulted in what they had with them of knowledge, and there beset them that which they used to mock* (40:82-83).

Considering and applying these verses to the story of Korah leaves no doubt that the intent of the word "knowledge" (*ʿilm*)—in the preceding verses (39:49-52 and 40:82-83) and in this verse where it reads *He said: I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have* where this knowledge is neither acknowledged as being a grant of God nor attributed to Him unlike the acknowledgement of those who counselled Korah in *And seek by means of what Allah has given you* (28:77) where they do attribute this grant as a benefaction of God on him goes to show that there was a concerted attempt at avoiding mentioning and acknowledging God's benevolence coupled with an attempt to belittle God's glory and greatness in a derogatory manner!

Did he not know that Allah had destroyed before him of the generations those who were mightier in strength than he and greater in assemblage? The interrogative form of this verse is meant to serve as a chiding rebuke and censure (*istifhām tawbīkhī*) and to serve as the simplest form of rejoinder to Korah's statement conveyed in this verse which reads *He said: I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have* so that he may realize the invalidity of his statement. This is because he thought that the thing by which he had obtained wealth and which would help maintain and secure it for him and which would allow him to enjoy it was his knowledge which was with him while he knew that those before him of past generations were stronger than him and greater in their accumulation of wealth. He claimed that what was with him of power and accumulated wealth was due to knowledge which was with him, yet God had destroyed him due to his crime; hence, if it was knowledge by which he was deluded and which he bragged about and which he considered to be the sole factor responsible for the accumulation of his wealth which

he enjoyed and relished, and that it was not a kind, magnanimous, and generous gift from God to him, then such knowledge should have saved the past generations from destruction and from being unable to enjoy their wealth. They should have been able to defend themselves by means of their power and should have been able to triumph by means of their collective number and collaborative effort!

As for the part of this verse that reads *And the guilty shall not be asked about their faults*, the apparent context suggests that its meaning is to clarify and enunciate God's *modus operandi* with respect to punishing the guilty and with regards to their destruction as a result of their sins. Thus it serves as a figurative speech which aims to suggest that they would not be given respite nor be allowed to present what they had devised of excuses or what they had prepared of humility and repentance by which they hoped for salvation. This is akin to those influential and powerful people from among mankind who, when they intend to punish a person over whom they have authority, they ask him about his crime so that they may judge him for his crime and decree its punishment, where it may happen that the guilty person is able to deflect the punishment to be meted out to him by way of excuses which he may have prepared for himself; however, God, , due to His knowledge of the reality of circumstances does not ask the guilty about their crimes, rather He judges them and consequently they are overtaken by punishment which cannot be averted.

It is apparent from this that the sentence serves as a complement to the preceding censure and chiding rebuke as well as serving as a response to Korah attributing his wealth to his personal knowledge. The message obtained is that divine punishment is not like human punishment such that were humans to blame, censure, and admonish a guilty person, the latter could yet deflect the potential punishment from himself by contriving excuses thereby benefiting from his knowledge; rather, this is God who is omniscient and omnipresent. He does not need to ask the guilty about his crime, instead, He just overwhelms him by punishment, and He punishes the guilty person suddenly while the guilty person does not even know it. This is what the context suggests regarding the meaning of the verse; however, other scholars have suggested alternative interpretations.

It has been suggested that what is meant by "knowledge" in *He said: I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have* refers to knowledge of the Torah for Korah was the most learned in it from the Children

of Israel. It is also suggested that it refers to knowledge of alchemy which he had learnt from Moses, Yūshaʿ b. Nūn and Kālib b. Yūqinā while the meaning of the phrase *the knowledge I have* means his expertise and specialization in it to the exclusion of the rest of mankind. Thus he had produced by means of this knowledge a huge quantity of gold! It is also suggested that "knowledge" in this verse *He said: I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have* means the knowledge of extracting treasures and treasure troves and that he had extracted by means of this knowledge abundant treasure and treasure troves. It is also suggested that the meaning of the term "knowledge" is the knowledge of God in which case the intended meaning of the verse is "I have been given knowledge from God which is a special allocation from Him to me, which He intended for me" while the meaning of the phrase *the knowledge I have* means "the knowledge that forms part of my thoughts and opinions." It is also suggested that the meaning of "knowledge" in this verse is the knowledge of God but in the sense of "that which is made known or taught by God." Hence the meaning is: "I have been given this wealth only on account of a blessing which God taught me and which is with me." In light of all these opinions the preposition *ʿalā* that occurs in this sentence, which is *ūtītuhu ʿalā ʿilmin ʿindī* means one of two things here. It either connotes the meaning of "on," "upon," "above" something but in an abstract sense of superior rank and degree (*al-istiʿlāʾ*) and not in a literal and physical sense. Hence the meaning would be: *He said: I have been given this only on the basis of the superior rank and degree of knowledge that I have* just as it could also validly mean "for," "on account of," or "due to" (*al-taʿlīl*); that is, "due to" or "for the sake of" or "on account of the knowledge I possess."

It is also suggested that the meaning of the "questioning" that occurs in the latter part of this verse—*And the guilty shall not be asked about their faults*—refers to the questioning on the Day of Resurrection; however, the questioning does not mean a kind which attempts to seek out information since God is the best informed of their sins and does not need to question them in order to know while the angels know their sins from the records of their deeds and from their distinctive signs. As for *And stop them, for they shall be questioned* (32:74), it refers to questioning in the sense of scolding and rebuke and not questioning in order to inquire and obtain information. It is also possible that the questioning mentioned in

both these verses has one and the same meaning while the negation of questioning in one verse [28:78] and its confirmation in the other [37:24] is due to the different stations of the Day of Resurrection. Thus they will be questioned at one station but not at the other and therefore there is no contradiction between the two verses.

It is suggested that the masculine third person plural pronominal suffix *him* refers to those sinners who are worse and exceedingly sinful while the referent of *al-mujrimūn*—the guilty—in this verse is to other than the exceedingly sinful. Hence the meaning that is supposedly intended is: "Those sinners who are other than the very worse and other than the exceedingly sinful shall not be asked or questioned about the sins of the very worse and exceedingly sinful people, the latter being those whom God had destroyed from among the past generations." However, all these opinions and perspectives are instances of explanations and interpretations which do not correlate well with the context of this verse.

فَخَرَجَ عَلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فِي زِينَتِهِ ۖ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يُرِيدُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا يَا لَيْتَ لَنَا
مِثْلَ مَا أُوتِيَ قَارُونُ إِنَّهُ لَذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٧٩﴾

(28:79) ***So he went forth to his people in his finery. Those who desire this world's life said: O would that we had the like of what Korah is given; most surely, he is possessed of mighty good fortune.***

The word *al-ḥaẓẓu* that occurs in the latter part of this verse—*innahu ladhū ḥaẓẓin ʿaẓīm*—means "share or portion of happiness," "joy," "luck," and "fortune."

Those who desire this world's life: This means those who make this world's life their desired and sought-after goal or purpose, in their lives and in their efforts and endeavors such that they do not have any other goal and aim save it. Consequently, they are woefully ignorant of the life hereafter and of what God has prepared for His slaves in it of rewards. God says: *Therefore turn aside from him who turns his back upon Our reminder and does not desire anything but this world's life. That is their goal of knowledge* (53:29-30).

As a result, such people considered what Korah had been granted of wealth as a mighty good fortune for him and which they considered good in an absolute and unconditional sense, not subject to any reservation!

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ وَيْلَكُمْ ثَوَابُ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لِمَنْ آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَلَا يُلَقَّاهَا إِلَّا الصَّابِرُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

(28:80) ***And those who were given the knowledge said: Woe to you! Allah's reward is better for him who believes and does good, and none is made to receive this except the patient.***

The word *al-wayl* that occurs in this verse means "ruin," "perdition," "destruction." It tends to be used as an invocation for destruction and ruin and as a way to discourage, restrain, and prevent a person from what is unsatisfactory, unacceptable, disagreeable and unpleasant. In this verse, it has the second meaning which is that of discouragement and restraint from the wish and desire voiced by the ignorant believers mentioned in the previous verse. *And none is made to receive this except the patient* (28:80) refers to those who uttered the words of restraint and discouragement to the ignorant believers. The latter were the believers possessing knowledge of God. They addressed these words to those ignorant people who had wished that they were given similar to what Korah had been given and which they considered a mighty good fortune in an absolute sense. The intent of the believers was that the reward of God was better for whoever believed and did good deeds in comparison to what Korah had been given. Thus if they were true believers in God and virtuous then they would wish for God's reward [rather than the wealth of Korah].

And none is made to receive this (*yulaqqāhā, from al-talqiyah*) except the patient: The verbal noun *al-talqiyah* means "to give someone something to understand," "to make someone understand or see something" while the verbal noun *al-talaqqī* means "understanding and taking or receiving something." As for the feminine pronominal suffix *-hā* that is appended to the verb *yulaqqā*, it is suggested to refer to *al-kalimah al-mafhūma*, meaning "the understood speech." This interpretation is made on the basis of the context. Hence the meaning obtained is: "And none understands this speech which is *Allah's reward is better for him who believes and does good* save the patient ones." It is also suggested that the feminine pronominal suffix refers to *al-sīrah* or *al-ṭarīqah* [both of which are feminine nouns]. They mean "the line or mode of conduct," "the way and the path," in which case the meaning of this part of the verse is: "None understands this mode of conduct and way, or achieves success in acting

according to it save the patient ones."

The patient ones are those who have donned the attire of patience during adversity and in the course of obeying God and when struggling against disobeying God. As for these patient ones being those who have received or have been given to understand this speech or mode of conduct and path—which is the affirmation that the rewards of the hereafter are better than the portion of worldly good fortune whereby the rewards of the hereafter are inseparable from faith and virtuous deeds, which in turn aid in abandoning many whims and fancies as well as aid in abstaining from many desires and cravings—this is only actualized in a person who has the quality of patience in the face of the bitterness of opposing human nature and opposing the rebelliousness of the tempting aspect of the human soul.

فَخَسَفْنَا بِهِ وَبِدَارِهِ الْأَرْضَ فَمَا كَانَ لَهُ مِنْ فِئَةٍ يَنْصُرُونَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُنْتَصِرِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

(28:81) ***Thus We made the earth swallow him up and his abode, so he had no body of helpers to assist him against Allah, nor was he of those who could defend themselves.***

The masculine third person singular pronominal suffix *-hi* which occurs twice in the initial part of this verse refer to Korah while this sentence occurs in the form of describing the ramification or concomitant effect of Korah's rebelliousness and intransigence. As for *so he had no body of helpers to assist him* (yanṣurūnahu, from al-naṣr) *against Allah, nor was he of those who could defend themselves* (al-muntaṣirīn, from al-intiṣār), the word *al-fiʾatu* that occurs in this verse refers to a group whose members incline and side with each other while the verbal nouns *al-naṣr* and *al-intiṣār* have, in the repertoire of their meanings, the meaning of "to help repel," "to help prevent," "to help defend." Hence the meaning obtained is that: "Korah did not have a body of helpers who could help prevent the divine punishment afflicting him nor was he able to prevent the occurrence of that which was contrary to what he used to think and suppose, which was the contention that the factor which would bring him goodness and thwart evil was his power and his accumulated wealth which he had amassed by means of his knowledge. Thus neither did his accumulated wealth protect and safeguard him nor did his power benefit him against

God; rather, it became manifestly clear that it was God who was the One who had granted him what He had granted him."

The meaning intended to be conveyed is that the falsity of what Korah used to claim for himself would become apparent and manifest by Our making the earth swallow him up along with his abode.[1] This refers to his claim that he had wealth because he merited it, and that he could do without God ; that the thing that would bring him good and thwart evil was his power and his accumulated wealth; and that he had earned and achieved it all by means of his intellectual genius and knowledge.

وَأَصْبَحَ الَّذِينَ تَمَنَّوْا مَكَانَهُ بِالْأَمْسِ يَقُولُونَ وَيْكَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ ۖ لَوْلَا أَنْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا لَخَسَفَ بِنَا ۖ وَيْكَأَنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

(28:82) ***And those who yearned for his place only the day before began to say: Ah! [Know] that Allah amplifies and straitens the means of subsistence for whom He pleases of His servants; had not Allah been gracious to us, He would most surely have abased us. Ah! [Know] that the ungrateful are never successful.***

Qur'anic commentators have suggested that the particle *way* denotes remorse, regret, and repentance. Perhaps it is also used to denote wonder as in "what an amazing thing!" Both meanings can be said to conform to the verses' circumstance although the former meaning occurs more spontaneously to the mind.

Ah! [Know] that Allah amplifies and straitens the means of subsistence for whom He pleases of His servants: This serves as an acknowledgment and an admission on the part of the ignorant believers of the falsity and invalidity of what Korah used to claim, a claim which they used to endorse

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1 The letter *fā*ʾ that is prefixed to the negative particle *mā*—in *famā kāna lahu min fi*ʾ*atin…*—is in order to indicate that the sentence following it serves as a concomitant to the previous sentence which was *Thus We made the earth swallow him up and his abode* (28:81). (Auth.)

2 The conjunctive particle *fā*ʾ implies a close connection between the sentences before and after it. This connection may be either a definite cause and effect one or that of a natural sequence of events. Here, it is most probably the first connection that applies. (Trans.)

and confirm. This was the claim that power and accumulation of wealth in the world is due to the intellectual genius of the human being, due to his knowledge and skill at management and planning and not due to the grace of God ; however, the ample sustenance and its paucity occurs by the will and intent of God.

The position of this verse denotes the sense of realization and understanding beyond obscurity and ambiguity which are better suited to doubt, hesitance, and indecision; however, they have used the particle *waykaʾanna* in their speech to indicate the inception of doubt on their part with respect to Korah's claim which they had previously accepted and endorsed. Such style is widespread in use.

The evidence in favor of this interpretation is their speech which follows—*had not Allah been gracious to us, He would most surely have abased us*—which occurs by way of assertion and realization on their part. As for the speech of God—*Ah! [Know] that the ungrateful are never successful*—it occurs in the sense of regret and remorse for the second time and as an attempt at extricating themselves from the necessary consequence of wishing and desiring to be in the place and position of Korah.

تِلْكَ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ نَجْعَلُهَا لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُرِيدُونَ عُلُوًّا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فَسَادًا ۚ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

(28:83) ***[As for] that future abode, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief, and the good end is for those who guard [against evil].***

This verse and the next occur in the sense of the outcome derived from this story. As for the phrase which reads *[As for] that* (tilka) *future abode…*, its use of the feminine singular demonstrative pronoun *tilka* ("that") which implies distance and remoteness is in order to indicate the future abode's honor, dignity, majesty, and superior status which in turn testifies that what is meant is the fortunate, blissful abode of the hereafter, which is the reason scholars have explained it to mean "paradise."

We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth or to make mischief: This means: "We have specifically reserved paradise for them," while the meaning of the phrase "desire to exalt" is "the desire to be superior and to seek to behave haughtily and arrogantly towards the slaves of God." This is while the meaning of the phrase "to

make mischief" means "to seek to disobey God." This is because God has established His path and His teachings which are a responsibility on mankind and are founded on the basis of the needs and requirements of their nature and their creation while the nature of the human being does not require anything other than what agrees with and is in line with the best system applicable to the earthly life of humanity. Consequently, every act of disobedience causes corruption in the land either indirectly or directly. God says: *Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return* (30:41).

From here it becomes clear that the intention to seek superiority is one of the instances of intending to make mischief and cause corruption in the land while this particular feature has been singled out for mention here in order to draw attention to it. Hence the meaning obtained is "that blissful abode of the future is specifically reserved for those who do not intend to make mischief or to spread corruption in the land by means of arrogance and haughtiness towards the slaves of God. Nor do they intend to make mischief or cause corruption by means of any other act of disobedience." This verse under discussion is general in meaning; however, the following verse specifies its meaning: *If you shun the great sins which you are forbidden, We will do away with your small sins and cause you to enter an honorable place of entering* (4:31).

The part of this verse that reads *and the good end is for those who guard [against evil]* refers to the beautiful praiseworthy end which is the blissful abode of the hereafter or it refers to the blissful end in the world and the hereafter altogether; however the context of the two verses advocates in favor of the first interpretation.

مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ خَيْرٌ مِنْهَا ۖ وَمَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَى الَّذِينَ عَمِلُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾

(28:84) *Whoever brings good, he shall have better than it, and whoever brings evil, those who do [much] evil shall not be rewarded [for] aught except what they were doing.*

The part of this verse that reads *Whoever brings good, he shall have better than it* means that the good done shall be multiplied for the person by the grace of God. God says *Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have*

ten like it (6:160). As for the speech of God that reads *and whoever brings evil, those who do evil shall not be rewarded [for] aught except what they were doing*. It means they shall not be subjected to additional or incremental punishment to what they had done. This is the most perfect of justice just as the reward for the good done is specified to be better than it, which is the most perfect of grace.

The apparent reading of the part of this verse that reads *and whoever brings evil, those who do [much] evil shall not be rewarded [for] aught except what they were doing* suggests ambiguity, and perhaps the placing of the relative plural pronoun *alladhīna* ("those who") in place of the relative singular pronoun [which is *man*, translated as "whoever," which is what this part of the verse begins with] suggests that this requital is for one who is an excessive perpetrator of evil such that sins encompass him. This perspective appears corroborated by the occurrence of the plural noun *al-sayyiʾāt* ("much evil or sins") in this part of the verse. The terminal part of this verse which reads *what they were doing* (28:84) suggests persistence and continuity. As for the person who brings evil and good (rather than much evil), it is hoped and anticipated that God shall forgive him just as God says in: *And others have confessed their faults, they have mingled a good deed and an evil one; may be Allah will turn to them [mercifully]; Allah is Forgiving, Merciful* (9:102).

Let it be known with respect to good and evil that their fundamental criterion rests on the effect they have on a human being, and it is on this basis that deeds are considered or judged good and evil, and it is on this basis and not on the constituent of the act in the external world that a person is rewarded or requited. This is because the constituent of the act in the external world is only a type of movement. God says: *And whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it; then He will forgive whom He pleases and chastise whom He pleases, and Allah has power over all things* (2:284).

With this, the response to the problem raised with regards to the application of this verse to monotheism becomes apparent. The problem is that monotheism is a good deed and goodness better or superior to it cannot be conceived. The answer to that is that this verse is either specific to non-creedal matters or it is specific to monotheism. This is because the outcome that obtains from belief in monotheism is one for which we can conceive something better, even if this cannot be accepted for monotheism itself

per se, because monotheism has different levels and can either be strong or weak, greater or lesser. If it is weak [and deficient] then so will be its reward, as we have seen earlier; hence, its multiple will be greater than it.

Examining Narrations

(1) It is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās:
Korah was from Moses' people. He was the son of Moses' paternal uncle. He used to seek knowledge till he had acquired abundant knowledge. He continued in this fashion till he became envious of Moses and rebelled against him. Moses said to him: "God has instructed me to collect the *zakāt* dues"; however, Korah declined to give them, and provoked the people saying: "Moses intends to appropriate your wealth. He came with the rituals of worship as well as with other teachings and you bore them all, but will you bear to give up your wealth to him?"
They replied: "We shall not, so what do you suggest?"
He said: "I suggest that I send for a prostitute from among the prostitutes of the Children of Israel and then we should send her to him so that she may accuse him of desiring her for himself."
Consequently, they did as planned. They told her: "We wish to give you an instruction, which is that you should testify against Moses that he committed adultery with you." She agreed.
Subsequently, Korah went to Moses and said: "Gather the Children of Israel together and inform them of what your God has instructed you." Moses agreed and gathered them together.
They asked him: "What has your Lord instructed you?"
Moses replied: "He has instructed me to inform you that you should worship Him alone and that you should not associate anything with Him; that you should maintain ties of kinship… and He has instructed me with respect to an adulterer that if he commits adultery and is married, then he should be stoned."
They asked him: "Even if that person is you?"
He replied in the affirmative, whereupon they accused him: "You have committed adultery!"
He said [in shock and disbelief]: "I?!"
So they sent for the woman, who came, and they asked her: "What is it that you wish to testify against Moses?"

Moses interjected and said to her: "I adjure you by God to speak the truth."
So she said: "If you are adjuring me by God, they called me and bribed me in return for my slandering you with the accusation of having had unlawfully copulated with me; however, I testify that you are innocent and that you are the messenger of God."
At this, Moses fell down prostrate, weeping, whereupon God revealed to him: "What makes you weep? We have given you control over the earth, so command it and it shall do your bidding."
Moses raised his head and ordered the earth: "Seize them."
So it seized them up to their heels at which they began to beg and call Moses, crying out: "Moses! Moses!"
He said to the earth again: "Seize them!" and the earth seized them up to their throats and they cried out: "Moses! Moses!" He said to the earth: "Seize them" and the earth devoured them, upon which God revealed to Moses: "Moses, my slaves beseeched you and humbled themselves to you, but you did not respond positively and you refused to relent; however, I swear by My might and dignity if they had called out to Me, I would have answered them positively."
That is the meaning of *Thus We made the earth swallow him up and his abode* (28:81): the earth swallowed him up, relegating him to its lowest depths.[1]

Author's comment: A similar report has also been transmitted from ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Ḥātim from Ibn Nawfal al-Hāshimi; however, in this variant the woman arrived at the gathering called by Korah so that she could testify against Moses of adultery in front of the Children of Israel and so that she could complain against him. However, when she came to him, she instead admitted to the truth to the Children of Israel. This news subsequently reached Moses, and he complained to his Lord who granted him power and authority over him.

(2) Another variant of this anecdote is reported by al-Qummī in his *Tafsīr* where the report says that Moses came to Korah and conveyed to him the commandment to pay the *zakāt* dues; however,

1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah in al-*Muṣannaf* and on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Ḥākim who authenticated it, and on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

> Korah mocked and ridiculed him and threw him out of the house, whereupon Moses complained to God against him, and consequently God granted him power and authority over Korah. As a result, the earth swallowed him up and his abode.

This latter report is however graded as *mawqūf*.[1] Furthermore, this report comprises of details that are rejected, and that is the reason we have left out transmitting it here [and have instead merely related it in paraphrase]. Similarly, the two reports from Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn Nawfal al-Hāshimī, respectively, are also graded as *mawqūf*, in addition to which the report of Ibn ʿAbbās relates that Korah rebelled and transgressed against Moses while the verses of the Qur'an say that Korah's transgression was against the Children of Israel. Moreover, the report indicates that the knowledge which was with Korah was what he had acquired by study and learning while the apparent significance of the verse, as discussed previously, is that his knowledge pertained to the means and methods of acquiring riches and fortunes and the like.

This account of Korah and Moses occurs in the present version of the Old Testament in a different manner, which is as follows:

> Now Korah, the son of Baṣhār, the son of Nohāt, the son of Levi, and Dāthān and Abirām, the sons of Ilyāb, and Own, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, gathered men and rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel. These were two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, and men of renown. They gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them: "You take too much upon yourselves, when the entire congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you raise yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?"
>
> When Moses heard this, he fell upon his face and addressed Korah and all his company: "Tomorrow the Lord will show who are His, and who is holy, and will draw the chosen person near Him: him whom He has chosen will He cause to draw near him. So do the following: take your incense burners and put fire therein, and put

1 *Mawqūf* literally means "stopped." A report of this kind transmits a statement or an act on the authority of a companion of an infallible rather than on the authority of the infallible him or herself and is therefore rendered unauthoritative. (Trans.)

incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be that the person whom the Lord chooses, he shall be holy. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi."

It continues to tell of how they came the next day with their incense burners containing fire and incense and gathered at the entrance of the tent designated for the meeting. Thereafter it is narrated:

> The earth split open under them, opening wide and engulfed them and their houses—all who were with Korah with all their wealth—and they all descended into the pit along with what was theirs, alive, to hell. Then the earth closed on them and they perished before the congregation. And all the Children of Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them, for they said "lest the earth swallow us up also!" And there came out a fire from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.[1]

(3) It is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās with respect to the *Surely Korah was of the people of Moses* (28:76):

> He was the son of Moses' maternal aunt.

This same identification of Korah's relationship with Moses is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq.[2]

(4) ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī said the following with respect to *and We had given him treasures so much so that their keys would certainly weigh down a company of men possessed of great strength* (28:76):

> A band of strong people used to carry the keys to his treasures.[3]

(5) Imam ʿAlī with respect to *and do not neglect your portion of this world* (28:77):

> Do not neglect your health, your strength, your spare time, your youth, and your vitality to seek the hereafter by their means.[4]

(6) ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī said the following with respect to *So*

1 Numbers 16.

2 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān.*

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī.*

4 *Maʿānī al-Akhbār* via its chain of narration on the authority of Mūsa ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Mūsa ibn Jaʿfar, from his father, from his grandfather, from his forefathers.

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he went forth to his people in his finery (28:79):
Korah went forth to his people attired in colored [or dyed] clothes letting them trail on the ground.[1]

(7) Zādān relates the following regarding Amīr al-Muʾminīn:
He used to walk in the markets when he was the ruler, guiding the straying people. He would help the weak and he would pass by the sellers and the grocers where the Qur'an would be opened up for him and he would recite: *[As for] that future abode, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief…* (28:83), and he would say: "This verse was revealed for those who are just and humble from among the rulers and from among those possessing power and influence from the entirety of mankind."
He also relates from Amīr al-Muʾminīn:
It will happen that the shoestring of a person's footwear will please and delight him and consequently he shall fall foul of this verse: *[As for] that future abode, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief* (28:83).[2]

Author's comment: Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs relates the same report in *Saʿd al-Suʿūd* from al-Ṭabrisī as follows:

Amīr al-Muʾminīn [said]: "It shall surely please and delight a person to have the shoestring of his footwear be superior to the shoestring of his companion or friend whereupon he shall fall foul of this verse!"

(8) It is narrated from the Prophet with respect to *[As for] that future abode, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief, and the good end is for those who guard [against evil]* (28:83):
It means to behave in a proud and haughty manner in the land and to appropriate (the property of others) unjustly.[3]

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī.*

2 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān.*

3 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of al-Muḥāmulī and al-Daylamī from Abū Hurayra.

Verses 85-88

These verses feature as the termination of this sūrah. They contain a beautiful, hope-inspiring promise to the Prophet that God shall bless him by raising aloft his significance and prestige, that He shall make his teachings become well established and widely prevalent, making the faith that he preached advance and progress greatly, and that He shall extend peace and security to him and to those who believed in him just as He had done with Moses and the Children of Israel. This is while the story of Moses and the Children of Israel narrated in this sūrah was exactly in order to convey and clarify just such a reality.

إِنَّ الَّذِى فَرَضَ عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لَرَادُّكَ إِلَىٰ مَعَادٍ ۚ قُلْ رَبِّى أَعْلَمُ مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَمَنْ هُوَ فِى ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٨٥﴾

(28:85) ***Most surely He Who has made the Qurʾan binding on you will bring you back to the destination. Say: My Lord knows best him who has brought the guidance and him who is in manifest error.***

The noun *al-farḍ* has been defined as "imposing something as an obligation," "to make something binding." Hence the meaning of the sentence in this verse that reads *faraḍa ʿalayka al-Qurʾān*, which is translated as (*He*)*… has made the Qur'an binding on you* means: "He has imposed on you the obligation to practice and actualize the teachings of the Qur'an" or "He has made it binding on you to put into practice the teachings of the Qur'an with respect to what these contain of laws and regulations." Thus this part of the verse is in the form of a relational metaphor.[1]

Some commentators have suggested an interpretation that is better than the previous one, which is that the meaning of the sentence *He has made the Qur'an binding on you* means: "He has made the recitation, preaching, and practice of the Qur'an binding on you." This interpretation is better since it is in harmony with the next part of this same verse

1 See the translator's second note under verse 28:57. (Ed.)

which reads *[He] will bring you back to the destination*, in light of what is to follow regarding its meaning.

As for the part of this verse that reads *[He] will bring you back to the destination*, the word *maʿād* that occurs in this verse is either a noun of place or a noun of time[1] and is derived from the verbal noun *al-ʿawd* ("to return," "returning"). The interpretations of the scholars differ with respect to the referent of this term. Thus it is suggested that it refers to Mecca in which case the verse contains a promise to the Prophet Muḥammad that God shall return him once again to Mecca after his migration to Medina. It is also suggested that this word refers to death or to the resurrection or to the plain of the day of resurrection. It is also suggested that it refers to the praiseworthy station (*al-maqām al-maḥmūd*) which is the station of the great intercession (*al-shafāʿah al-kubrā*) promised to the Prophet Muḥammad just as it is also suggested to refer to paradise and to Bayt al-Maqdis (in Jerusalem). In case of the ultimate referent, it would in fact refer to the promise of a second ascent (*al-miʿrāj*) where the Prophet would once again visit Bayt al-Maqdis after having had visited it once before during the experience of the first ascent (*al-miʿrāj*). Finally, it is also suggested to refer to "the beloved matter or affair." Most or all of these suggested referents for the word *maʿād* may be admitted as valid interpretations for it.

The matter which invites reflection and contemplation in the course of studying the verses of this sūrah and their contexts is that this verse under discussion [28:85] serves as a clarification for the narrative related at the beginning of the sūrah, hinting at it, while the verses that follow this verse [28:85] confirm and endorse it.

Thus, God related the story of the Children of Israel and Moses at the inception of this sūrah elaborating in detail as to how He blessed them with peace and security, dignity, glory, and power after they had been humiliated and rendered helpless and weak due to the tyranny of the Pharaoh's people. The latter butchered their sons while letting their women-folk live. This narrative had concomitantly indicated a beautiful, hope-inspiring promise for the believers, which the introductory section of this sūrah corroborates, which was that God would rescue them from the trials, severity, and hardship that they suffered, and that He would

1 A noun of place (*ism al-makān*) expresses the place where the action of the verb is performed while the noun of time (*ism al-zamān*) expresses the time or occasion of that action. (Trans.)

render their religion triumphant over all faiths, and that He would settle them in the land thereby changing their state for the better, after their previous state which was such that the sky refused to shelter them and the land refused to carry them.

Then, after completing the story, God mentions that it is imperative in light of divine wisdom to reveal a book that guides mankind to the truth by way of a reminder and by way of completing the proof. This is so that mankind may save itself, due to the reminder, from God's punishment just as He had revealed a book to Moses after having had destroyed the past generations and just as He revealed a book to the Prophet Muḥammad. This was even though the Meccan polytheists belied it in stubborn resistance to the truth and in preference to the life of this world rather than that of the hereafter.

Such a context inspires hope in the listener that God would certainly bring to fruition what He had indicated and hinted at in the course of the story. Thus when the listener hears the words *Most surely He Who has made the Qur'an binding on you will bring you back to the destination*, it does not take the listener long before s or he realizes that this is the beautiful, hope-inspiring promise which s or he had been anticipating, especially when the verse begins with the words *Most surely He Who has made the Qur'an binding on you*. This is while the parallel between the Torah and the Qur'an had already been made previously while what He had narrated of the story of the rescue of the Children of Israel served as a prologue to the revelation of the Torah such that the Children of Israel became leaders and heirs due to accepting it and acting on its teachings.

Thus the meaning of the verse is as follows: "The One Who made the Qur'an binding on you so that you may recite it to the people, convey it to them, and act according to its teachings shall return you to a place whereby this returning to it shall prove to be a real returning for you and the place of return shall prove a destination for you. This is similar to how He made the Torah binding on Moses and thereby raised his station and the station of his people."

It is well-known that the Prophet used to reside in Mecca where he suffered hardships, difficulties, and tribulations, consequently migrating to Medina from there. Then he returned to Mecca in triumph—as a winner, whereby the principles and teachings of his faith were established and strengthened, and the idols were broken while the foundations of

polytheism were decimated and destroyed, and the believers became the heirs of the land after they had previously been humble, tortured, and oppressed.

The indefinite form of the word *maʿād* in this verse serves to indicate the great and sublime significance of this return such that it cannot be compared to the Prophet's (previous) residence there, and history bears witness to that.

***Say: My Lord knows best him who has brought the guidance and him who is in manifest error*:** This serves to affirm the interpretation we have suggested, since it parallels the speech of Moses which he uttered when the Pharaoh and his people belied him and judged his clear signs as forged magic: *And Moses said: My Lord knows best who comes with guidance from Him, and whose shall be the good end of the abode* (28:37).

Thus God instructed the Prophet to say to the pharaohs from the polytheists of his people when they belied him and accused him of sorcery what Moses had said to the people of the Pharaoh when the latter belied the former and charged the former with sorcery. This was due to the complete similarity between the prophetic experiences of Moses and the Prophet Muḥammad as is evidenced by the story. This similarity between Moses and the Prophet is further attested to and brought to light fully in: *Surely We have sent to you a Messenger, a witness against you, as We sent a messenger to the Pharaoh* (73:15).

This verse suffices with citing just the first part of Moses' response and does not cite the second part of his response, which was *and whose shall be the good end of the abode* (28:37). This is probably due to the contextual demands of the composition of this speech in that the speech should not exceed the limits of indication and allusion. Additionally, the section is rendered complete in light of its context, when it says *[He] will bring you back to the destination* (28:85), where the address is specifically directed at the Prophet Muḥammad and which address mentions the term *maʿād* (destination).

However it may be, the one referred to in *[he] who has brought the guidance* is the Prophet Muḥammad himself while the referent in *and him who is in manifest error* is to the polytheists from his people. This is while the difference in the manner of address—such that in reference to the Prophet the verse says *[he] who has brought the guidance* while in reference to the polytheists it says *and him who is in manifest error*, whereby

the comparison is between the error of the polytheists and the *bringing of the guidance* by the Prophet rather than a comparison between their error and the Prophet's state of being rightly guided—is because their belying the Prophet was essentially directed at what he had brought forth rather than at his person.[1]

وَمَا كُنْتَ تَرْجُو أَنْ يُلْقَىٰٓ إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابُ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۖ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ ظَهِيرًا لِلْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

(28:86) ***And you did not expect that the Book would be inspired to you, but it is a mercy from your Lord; therefore, be not a backer of the unbelievers.***

The beginning part of this verse serves as confirmation for the beautiful, hope-inspiring promise that occurs in the previous verse which reads: *Most surely He Who has made the Qur'an binding on you will bring you back to the destination*. It means: "God shall return you to the destination while you do not expect it just as He inspired the Book to you which you did not expect."

It is also suggested that it serves as a renewed reminder of the blessings

1 The commentators have said, with respect to the part of this verse that reads *rabbī aʿlamu man jāʾa bi al-hudā* (My Lord knows best him who has brought the guidance, 28:85) that the relative pronoun *man* ("him," "who") that occurs here is in the accusative mode due to the effect of an implied verb which the superlative noun *aʿlamu* ("He knows best") points to. Thus the implication is *rabbī yaʿlamu man jāʾa bi al-hudā* ("my Lord knows him who has brought guidance"). This idea is advocated on the well-known basis that the superlative noun itself does not render the object in a sentence accusative [and therefore the need to consider the implied verb]. Other commentators have suggested that the relative pronoun *man* is in the accusative mode due to the superlative noun *aʿlamu* in the sense that it is considered to be in the active participle mode *ʿālimun*; however, this has no evidence to prove its efficacy while I maintain that the relative pronoun *man* is in the accusative mode due to the suppression of the preposition *bi* even if the accusative mode does not become apparent in the sentence due to the exigencies of its composition. Thus the implication is *rabbī aʿlamu bi-man jāʾa bi al-hudā*—which is valid since there is no evidence to counteract it such that it would be negated. (Auth.)

of God on the Prophet, which is a notable interpretation too. The statement of confirmation where God promises to return the Prophet to his destination, which contains an allusion to raising high his stature, the progress of his preaching, and the prevalence of his faith, also outlines for him the path that he is expected to traverse with diligence and careful oversight. Thus God clarifies to the Prophet that the inspiration of the Book to him was not in a manner akin to ordinary incidents, whereby it is in the nature of the latter that they are hoped for and anticipated; rather, the inspiration of the Book was in the form of a special mercy from his Lord, and He had promised him what He promised him when He made the Qur'an binding on him. Thus it was obligatory for the Prophet, in light of these blessings, in light of the progress of his call and its ultimate success which God had promised him, that he should not aid the disbelievers nor obey them—that he should call to his Lord to the exclusion of all other deities and that he should not be of the polytheists.

The part of this verse that reads *but it is a mercy from your Lord* conveys a certain and definite exception, meaning: "Nevertheless He inspired you 'as a mercy from your Lord' and it is not an ordinary inspiration whose like may be anticipated or wished for." As for the terminal part of this verse that reads *therefore be not a backer of the unbelievers*, it serves as additional information to *but it is a mercy from your Lord*, meaning: "If His inspiration to you was 'but as a mercy from your Lord' which He favored you with whilst this favor was beyond your expectations then, therefore, dissociate from the unbelievers and do not be a supporter or a helper to them."

It is highly probable that the terminal part of this verse features as a kind of parallel to Moses' statement which he uttered when he had killed the Copt. This is Moses' statement in 28:17 which reads: *He said: My Lord! Because Thou hast bestowed a favor on me, I shall never be a backer of the guilty*. In light of this, the prohibition to support the unbelievers contains an indication that the inspiration of the Book to the Prophet was a blessing with which God had blessed him and by means of which he was supposed to guide the people to the truth and call them to monotheism. Consequently it was incumbent on the Prophet not to help or aid the unbelievers in their denial and rejection, nor should he incline to them or heed their attempts at turning him away from the signs of God after their revelation to him, just as Moses had promised his Lord, in response

to God blessing him with judgment and knowledge, that he would not be a backer of the guilty, ever. It shall be seen shortly that the next verse which reads *And let them not turn you aside from the communications of Allah after they have been revealed to you, and call [men] to your Lord and be not of the polytheists* (28:87) serves as an explanatory commentary to this sentence.

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وَلَا يَصُدُّنَّكَ عَنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أُنْزِلَتْ إِلَيْكَ ۖ وَادْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ ۖ وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

(28:87) *And let them not turn you aside from the communications of Allah after they have been revealed to you and call [men] to your Lord and be not of the polytheists.*

This verse consists of a prohibition to the Prophet from turning away from the signs of God due to the verbal attempts of the unbelievers to turn him away from them and due to their efforts at dissuading him from them such that his turning away would be as a result of their prevention and hindering. This is similar to God's warning speech to Adam and his spouse: *So We said: O Adam! This is an enemy to you and to your wife; therefore, let him not drive you both forth from the garden so that you should be unhappy* (20:117), meaning: "Beware! Lest both of you end up leaving the garden due to Satan's driving both of you out of it by evil whisperings and insinuations."

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It is apparent that this verse and the one following it serve to explain and clarify verse 28:86 which reads *therefore be not a backer to the unbelievers*. Its aim and benefit is to emphasize the prohibitions one after the other. Thus God first forbids the Prophet from turning away from the Qur'an which was revealed to him. This was despite the polytheists' charges against the Book of God that it was a work of magic or a work of poetry or soothsaying or a work consisting of ancient tales which he had written down. Then God instructs him to call the people to his Lord, and finally, He forbids him to be from the polytheists, which God clarifies as referring to associating other gods with God. Furthermore, God repeats the attribute *al-rabb*—"the Lord or the Nourisher"—in these verses, appending it to the Prophet. This is in order to indicate the Prophet's special status as being one who was especially graced with mercy and blessings and as one who was singularly unique in his worship of God, a characteristic which the

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polytheists did not share with him in the worship of God.

وَلَا تَدْعُ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَٰهًا آخَرَ ۘ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۚ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ ۚ لَهُ الْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

(28:88) ***And call not with Allah any other Allah. There is no Allah but He. Everything is perishable but His Face; His is the judgment, and to Him, you shall be brought back.***

The beginning part of this verse which reads *and call not with Allah any other Allah* has already been discussed as one that occurs as an explanation to the speech of God in the previous verse, which reads *and be not of the polytheists* (28:87).

There is no Allah but He is a statement of sincerity denoting devotion and faith (in God), and it occurs as an explanation to God's speech that occurs at the beginning of this verse, which reads *and call not with Allah any other Allah* since there is no deity worthy of worship other than God. This very same part of the verse also occurs as an explanation to God's speech that follows it as it shall become clear shortly.

As for the part of this verse that reads *everything is perishable* (hālik) *but His face* (wajhahu), the word *shayʾ* ("thing") is equivalent to the word *mawjūd* ("existent"). It is applied to every existing thing to the extent that it is even applied to God as verse 6:19 attests: *Say: What thing is the weightiest in testimony? Say: Allah.* The term *halāk* means "to perish," "to expire," "to become non-existent," "to become ineffective and void." The terms *al-wajh* and *al-jihah* mean one and the same just as the word *al-waʿd* and *al-ʿidah* mean one and the same thing ("promise," "pledge"). The meaning of the term *wajh* in common parlance is "that by which something faces, meets or receives another thing or that by which something turns to another thing and by which it connects with it." When the word *al-wajh* is applied to a body, it refers to the apparent, manifest surface of it, while when it is applied with reference to a human being, it refers to the front half of their head. With respect to the *wajh* of God, it refers to that by which He turns to a being from His creatures and by which His creatures turn to Him. These are God's noble attributes such as life, power, knowledge, hearing, sight, and those attributes that are traced back to these aforementioned attributes from the attributes of acts such as creating, sustaining, giving life, causing death, forgiveness, mercy, as

well as His signs that point to Him.

Therefore everything is perishable and essentially void in and of itself. It has no reality save what it possesses of God's grace which is granted to it. As for that which may not be attributed to God, these are nothing save the deluded and confused fancies and illusions of the imagination or the mirages that the imagination has conjured such as the idols which have no reality save that they are stones or pieces of wood or things made of metal. As for the belief that these idols are gods and deities or things that are supposed to benefit or harm, these are nothing save names that their worshipers have coined. Similarly, the human being has no reality to him or her save what creation has entrusted it of a soul and a body and what the human being may achieve of the attributes of perfection. Instead, all of these are attributable to God while what the collective social intellect attributes to the human being of power, authority, leadership, nobility, wealth, dignity, glory, progeny and support are naught but mirages that shall perish and fade away. They are but false hopes and desires, and similar are all the existent things. They have no reality to them save what God grants them of His grace, which in turn serve as signs that point to His noble attributes such as mercy, providence, grace, benevolence and the like. Thus the reality that is established in truth, which shall never perish or become void from among things, is God's noble attributes and His signs which point to His attributes while all else is established due to or by the Sacred and Holy essence of God.

The above is based on the assumption that the meaning and intent of the term *hālik* in the verse under discussion means "perishable in fact," and thus the conclusion or meaning derived from the explanation of the statement of sincerity which is *there is no Allah but He* by *everything is perishable but His Face* is that God, who is the deity that is worshiped in truth, is a god that is worshiped only if He is a being that has a true reality which is not subject to perishing or destruction or subject to being voided. The power to manage the universe belongs to Him in light of this description while all else other than Him is void in and of itself, save what serves as a face for Him and is related to Him. Consequently, there is no god in existence other than God .

The idol-worshipers, even if they considered the existence of their gods to be related to God and to be from Him, rendered their gods independent of God in matters of planning and management of the universe

such that the relationship of these gods was considered severed from Him in the realm of the management of the universe whereby the command of the gods was considered independent of God's command. This is the reason they worshiped these gods instead of God; however, nothing enjoys independence from God in anything and none deserves worship save Him.

But there is yet another perspective or interpretation that is more accurate and exact than the previous one, which is that the meaning of the term *wajh* is suggested to refer to the very essence or being of a thing. This is what some scholars have suggested as the meaning for the term *wajh*. Thus, for example, *wajh al-nahār* (literally "the face of the day") or *wajh al-ṭarīq* (literally "the face of the path") mean "the day itself" or "the path itself" respectively. That is, *wajh* used in relation to the day and the path respectively mean these two things in and of themselves, even if this exegetical suggestion may be debated. Others have suggested that *wajh* refers to the "noble, reputable, dignified self" as *wujūh al-nās* (literally "the faces of the people") means "the noble, reputable, and dignified persons from among the people," which is a kind of figurative speech. Anyway, on the basis of both assumptions, the meaning and intent is that a being other than God is a contingent being. Even if it is existing due to having had been brought into existence by God, it is nevertheless subject to non-existence with respect to its being, and perishable and subject to being voided with respect to itself while the being to which voiding and perishing have no recourse is the essence and being of God which is necessary in and of itself—necessary in its essence and existence.

Hence the meaning obtained on the basis of this explanation is that the true and real God worthy of worship necessarily has to be a being in whose power and control lies the management of the universe while the management of the universe is not separate from the act of creating and originating things. Therefore there is no meaning or sense to the idea that one being creates various things and another manages its affairs. In this book, we have shed light repeatedly on the truism that the existent creator is nothing but the necessary existent while there is no necessary existent save Him, and therefore there is no God save Him.

The polytheists claim that God is far too exalted and far too glorified for the human intellect or imagination to encompass, and therefore it is not possible to turn one's devotional attention to Him in worship. Consequently, it becomes necessary to turn to Him in worship by turning

to some of those who are close to Him from among the noble angels and others so that they may act as intercessors with Him. This is negated on the basis that knowledge does not need to be encompassing in order for devotion and worship to be true and valid; rather, knowledge or cognizance is sufficient, and this is necessarily attainable.

As for the assumption that the meaning and intent of the term *hālik* in this verse under discussion refers to future annihilation, voiding, and extermination which is on the basis that the active participle[1] apparently points to the future, the apparent connotation of this part of the verse is that everything shall experience destruction and annihilation after its existence save the face of God. Indeed, the future annihilation of various things differs one from the other. Thus the future annihilation of a thing in terms of time refers to the coming to an end of the period of its existence and its subsequent voiding and annihilation, while with respect to others, it means the existence of a thing such that it is encompassed by extermination and annihilation from all sides. Therefore the perishing of things from this perspective means the voiding of their initial existence and of their being stripped of their initial coming into being or existence by their transfer to another, subsequent existence and their return to God and their settling in with God. As for absolute voiding after existence, the clear verses of the Book of God negate that. Hence the verses of the Book of God consecutively mention that the ultimate place of return for everything is with God and that everything shall end up with Him and to Him is the return, while He is the One who begins creation and then recreates it.

Thus the meaning for this verse that is obtained—if the meaning of the word *wajh* is understood to mean God's noble attributes—is that everything shall vacate its place and return to God save His noble attributes which are the wellsprings of His graces. Thus these pour forth graces time and again endlessly, and a deity necessarily has to be thus whereby its being suffers no voiding or termination, and nor do its attributes, which pour forth graces, suffer discontinuity, and since there is nothing other than Him who enjoys such a description, it consequently means that there is no God other than Him.

On the other hand if the term *wajh* is understood to refer to God's

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1 This is the form in which the term *hālik* occurs in this verse, the active participle being denoted by the form *fāʿil*. (Trans.)

holy and sacred being, then the meaning obtained is that everything shall meet with destruction, perishing, and annihilation by returning to God save His true, real, and established being to which perishing and annihilation have no recourse, in which case the attributes of God are reckoned to fall within the ambit of His being. A deity necessarily has to be of such kind whereby annihilation does not even touch it and there is nothing other than God that enjoys such a description. Consequently, there is no god other than Him.

On the basis of the preceding explanation, then, an objection is raised which is that things such as paradise, hell, and the Throne are included in the meaning and scope of this verse. This objection is made on the basis of the general nature of the verse to include these things within its ambit and scope. However, this objection is refuted since paradise and hell do not perish after having had come into existence, rather they continue to exist forever, *ad infinitum*. This also includes the Throne because some traditions say that the roof of paradise is the Throne. The basis for this refutation is that the meaning of annihilation is the change or transformation in the existence of a thing and its return to God which is expressed by the transition of a being *from this world to the hereafter* and by the very act of *returning after inception*. This relates to an existing being whose initial existence was this-worldly; however, as for the world-here-in-after and for beings that exist in that world such as paradise and hell, things such as these are not characterized by annihilation and perishing of this kind.

God says: *What is with you passes away and what is with Allah is enduring* (16:96); *And that which is with Allah is best for the righteous* (3:198); *There shall befall those who are guilty humiliation from Allah and severe chastisement because of what they planned* (6:124).

Similar to these two punishments [that is, humiliation and severe chastisement] are the treasures of God's mercy as God said in: *And there is not a thing but with Us are the treasures of it* (15:21). And similarly so is the Preserved Tablet. God says: *and with Us is a writing that preserves* (50:4). As for what they have mentioned about the Throne then the relevant discussion has already been made in the course of the commentary of verse 7:54.

It is also possible that the meaning of the word *wajh* is the direction of God which is attributed to Him. This is the direction that a person intends or the direction which a person aims for or directs himself to.

Such a meaning for this term is abundantly manifested in God's use of this term in His speech such as: *And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, they desire only His favor* (yurīdūna wajhahu) (6:52); *Except the seeking of the pleasure of his Lord, the Most High* (illā ibtighāʾa wajhi rabbihi al-aʿlā) (92:20). There are numerous similar verses.

As a result, this word becomes an expression for all that which may be ascribed or attributed to God alone. Thus even if this word, generally and on the basis of its apparent connotation, is applied to the first interpretation and meaning discussed above, the names of God, His attributes, His prophets and messengers, His vice-regents, and His religion which comes from Him can all be taken as valid and relevant instances of this word.

However if *wajh* is deemed to refer specifically to "religion" as suggested in some traditions, if such a specification is not deemed from the perspective of applying the word to a valid instance of it from a pool of valid instances for it (*al-tatbīq*), then the meaning of perishing and annihilation with respect to religion would mean the corruption and the loss of its effect, in which case this part of the verse would be understood to serve as an explanation for the sentence at the inception of this verse which reads *And call not with Allah any other Allah*, while that which appears before this verse serve as contextual evidence that the meaning and intent of the word *shayʾ* means "religion and the deeds and acts that relate to that religion." In such a case the meaning obtained is: "Do not take up as a religion any faith save the faith and religion of monotheism for every religion is void and has no effect save the faith and religion of monotheism."

Therefore, in light of the above, it is most appropriate that the meaning and referent of the word *al-ḥukm* at the tail end of this verse that reads *His is the judgment…* (*lahu al-ḥukm*) is legislative judgment (*al-ḥukm al-tashrīʿī*) or a meaning more general and wide than it, including the creative judgment (*al-ḥukm al-takwinī*) too. Hence the meaning would be: "Every religion shall perish save His religion since the legislation of the religion is His prerogative and to Him shall you all return, not to the legislators of other religions and faiths." This is what reflection and contemplation of this noble verse suggest; however, commentators of the Qur'an have suggested other, different opinions for it.

Thus it is suggested that the meaning of the term *wajhu* is the blessed,

sacred, and exalted being of God while the meaning of the active participle *hālik* is non-existence, and thus the meaning obtained is that everything, in and of itself, is subject to non-existence and annihilation since its existence ensues or originates from other than itself save the necessary being of God. Therefore this meaning rests on a comparison which is that everything other than God is as if it is annihilated and perishing because its existence relies and rests on other than itself.

It is also suggested that the term *wajh* occurs in the meaning of "self," "being," "essence" and its meaning, therefore, is the self and being of a thing while the masculine singular pronominal suffix *-hu* appended to the term *wajh* refers to God since the self or the being of a thing is that being's property and is owned by it, in which case the meaning obtained is that everything shall perish save the self and being of God since it is the self and being of that thing and its very existence.

It is also suggested that the term *wajh* refers to an intended and specified direction while the masculine singular pronominal suffix *-hu* pertains to God. Thus the meaning obtained is that everything will be subject to annihilation and perishing along with all that relates to it save the direction which is attributed to God and this refers to the existence which God has graced it with.

It is also suggested that the meaning of the term *hālik* is death, where the general nature of the verse is restricted and specified to those who possess life, in which case the meaning obtained is that everything that possesses life shall perish and die save His face.

It is also suggested that the term *wajh* refers to virtuous deeds whereby the meaning obtained is that the deed was in the realm of non-existence and so when the slave of God did it in obedience to the instruction and command of God, God consequently rendered it lasting without it being affected by nullification or annihilation till He rewarded it, or that the deed, on being accepted, became such that it would not accept annihilation since the reward resulting from it stands in its place and is everlasting.

It is also suggested that the term *wajh* refers to God's glory, honor, and prestige which He has established among mankind. And it is suggested that the annihilation mentioned in this verse has a general connotation, being applicable to all other than God, where it is a constant phenomenon and occurrence. This is because the existence that beings other than God enjoy and which has been bestowed on them is renewed every moment.

Thus it is ever-changing, ever-perishing, and annihilating in the world and in the hereafter, in which case the meaning obtained is that everything is constantly changing in its being and existence other than God.

These perspectives are such that some of them do not correlate with the context of the verse while others render the verse's proof unsuccessful while yet others are very far from the meaning of the verse. A careful consideration of what we have discussed and presented makes clear the value of these various perspectives, and therefore we are not prolonging the discussion further.

As for the part of the verse that reads *His is the judgment, and to Him, you shall be brought back*, the noun *al-ḥukm* means God's judgment and authority that is effective in things and on the basis of which operates the management and planning of the system of existence. As for this term meaning the discharge of His judgment on the Day of Resurrection, such a meaning is excluded by the bringing forward of the mention of His judgment in this verse to the mention of the return to Him which will be on the day of resurrection since the discharge of judgment will be subsequent to it. Both these sentences that make up the terminal part of this verse occur in the meaning of an explanation, and each one of the two, on its own, can serve as a complete proof in favor of the unity of God in His divinity, being qualified, capable, and relevant in explaining the meaning of sincerity to Him. Furthermore, it has already been suggested previously that the term *al-ḥukm* can be taken to mean "legislative judgment" in light of some of the aforementioned perspectives.

Examining Narrations

(1) It is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās regarding *Most surely He… will bring you back to the destination* (28:85):

It means back to Mecca,[1] just as He brought you out from there.[2]

Author's comment: It is related from Ibn ʿAbbās and from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī with respect to the verse *Most surely He… will bring you back to the destination* (28:85) that the "destination" refers to death. It is also

1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd, al-Bukhāri, al-Nasāʾi, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn al-Mardawayh as well as on the authority of al-Bayhaqi in his *al-Dalāʾil* by means of several chains of transmission.

2 This additional clause is reported by Ibn al-Mardawayh.

related from ʿAlī from the Prophet that the "destination" mentioned in this verse refers to paradise. The last two identifications for the verse under discussion are not explicit. And it is related in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* from Ḥarīz from Imam al-Bāqir and from Abū Khālid al-Kābūlī from Imam ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn that they said: "The destination mentioned in the verse *most surely He… will bring you back to the destination* refers to the *rajʿa*." This interpretation is probably an inner meaning (*al-baṭn*) suggested for this verse rather than an explanation (*al-tafsīr*) for it.

(2) It is related from Amīr al-Muʾminīn in a lengthy report:
Everything is perishable but His face… (28:8) means that everything is perishable except His religion since it is impossibly absurd and unreasonable that everything of God should perish while only His face should remain. He is far greater and exalted than that; rather whoever is not from Him shall perish. Have you not observed that God has said: *Everyone on it must pass away* (kullu man ʿalayhā fānn). *And there will endure forever the face of your Lord* (wa yabqā wajhu rabbika) (55:26-27)?[1]

(3) It is related from Ḥārith ibn al-Mughīrah al-Naṣrī:
Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about *everything is perishable but His face* (28:88).
He asked in turn: "What do they say about it?"
I replied: "They say that everything shall perish except the face of God."
He responded by saying: "Glory be to God, they have said a colossally monstrous thing! Rather what He meant by it was the 'face of God' that which comes forth from Him."[2]

Author's comment: A similar report is transmitted in *al-Tawḥīd* via its chain of transmission from Ḥārith ibn al-Mughīrah al-Naṣrī from the Imam, where the wording is: "I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about *everything is perishable but His face* (28:88). He replied: It means everything is perishable save whoever adopts the path of truth." The same report is related in *al-Maḥāsin* by al-Barqī save that its terminal part reads: "save whoever adopts the path which you are following [that is, the path the Prophet's

1 *Al-Ihtijāj.*

2 *Al-Kāfi,* via its chain of transmission on the authority of Sayf, from one whom he mentioned.

Ahl al-Bayt]."

The apparent confusion that comes across in these reports is because these reports have been transmitted in terms of their meaning [rather than strict verbal transmission]. Thus if *wajh,* in the sense of that which comes forth from God, refers to absolutely all that which may be attributed to Him and is from Him, then such a meaning is congruent with the first interpretation for this term that we suggested during the course of discussing this verse above. However, if the meaning of the term *wajh* is "religion," by means of which a person turns to God by his intention, then the meaning of the "perishing or annihilation" which occurs in this verse is voidance, uselessness, and lack of effect. In this case, the meaning would be: "There is no God but He. Every religion is void and useless save His true religion which comes forth from Him since the adherent shall benefit from it and shall be rewarded for it." An indication of these two perspectives has already been made in the course of the discussion of this verse above.

(4) ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī relates with respect to *therefore be not a backer of the unbelievers* (28:86):

This is addressed to the Prophet; however, the message is for the people. Similar is the verse that reads *And call not with Allah any other Allah* (28:88). The address is made to the Prophet, but the message is for the people. This understanding is based on the teaching of al-Ṣādiq who said: "God sent forth to His Prophet messages and teachings on the principle 'I intend you [by My apparent address], but listen O ye neighbor.'"[1]

End of Chapter 28

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī.*

Chapter 29

al-ʿAnkabūt (The Spider)

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Verses 1-13

Based on the tone of this sūrah's verses, and especially those at its opening, it appears that some of those who had believed in the Prophet in Mecca before the migration (*hijra*) withdrew from him out of fear of the persecution with which the polytheists had threatened them. This is because the polytheists used to call them to return to their religion and promised to bear for them their sins in return for following their path. However, if they refused, they would persecute and harass them to force them back into their religion.

God alludes to this with the words:

> *The faithless say to the faithful: Follow our way and we will bear [responsibility for] your iniquities.* (29:12)
>
> *Among the people there are those who say: We have faith in Allah; but when such a one is tormented in Allah's cause, he takes persecution by the people for Allah's punishment.* (29:10)

Amongst those who gave up their faith were those who gave it up because their parents pressured them to come back to their religion and implored them to renounce their beliefs, like some of the children of the polytheists according to the rebuke delivered in the verse: *We have enjoined man to be good to his parents. But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them* (29:8). And this sūrah was sent down concerning the matter of these persons.

So, based on what we can glean from its beginning, its conclusion and the general tenor of its verses, the goal of the sūrah is to say that what God means by "faith" is not merely to utter the words: "We have faith in God" (29:10) but to have the reality of faith (*ḥaqīqat al-īmān*) which does not shake with storms of persecution, nor change with the changing of time, rather which stands firm and immovable in the face of trials and tribulations. People will not be let off just because they say "We have faith in God" without being tried and tested to make visible what their heart contains of the reality of faith or the blemish of infidelity. God surely

knows those who are truthful and He knows the liars too.

Such trials and persecution are a divine habit (*sunna ilāhiyya*) that cannot be avoided; they happen to people today just as they happened to peoples past, like the peoples of Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd, Abraham, Lot, Shuʿayb and Moses. Some of these went aright and others perished; God did not wrong them, rather they used to wrong themselves.

So whoever says: "I have faith in God" must remain steadfast upon his faith and worship God alone. And if he cannot fulfil his religious duties, then he should emigrate to a land where he can do that, for God's earth is expansive. And he should not fear a hard life because sustenance is upon God and how many an animal there is that does not carry its own provision. God provides for it, and for mankind.

As for the polytheists who persecute the faithful without their having committed any crime save to say "Our Lord is God," they should not fancy that they are thwarting God or vying with Him. As for their treatment, harassment and persecution of the faithful, it is only a test for them and the faithful which is not outside of God's knowledge or determination. It is a test and it will be preserved for them; if He wishes he will seize them by its evil consequences in this world, and if He wishes he will put them off until the Day on which they return to Him and they shall have no escape.

And as for whatever arguments they contrive and falsehoods they rely upon, they are refuted and cast back upon them; the proof has been clearly established for them.

This summarizes the goal of the sūrah. The corollary of this is that the whole sūrah must be Meccan. Those who say it is Medinan, whether in whole, most or part—and we shall discuss this further in the study of narrations below—are incorrect. The contents of this sūrah are only compatible with the time of great pressure and hardship before the migration.

الم ﴿١﴾ أَحَسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ ﴿٢﴾

(29:1-2) ***Alif, Lām, Mīm. Do the people suppose that they will be let off because they say* (an yaqūlū)*: We have faith, and they will not be tested?***

"To suppose" (*ḥisbān*) means "to think." The sentence *that they will be let off* functions as both of its objects. *An yaqūlū* carries the meaning of the *bāʾ* of causation (*sababiyya*). "To test" (*fitna*) means to examine

(*imtiḥān*). While sometimes it is used for afflictions and persecution, the first meaning best fits the context. The question in the verse is rhetorical, implying a denial.

So the meaning is: "Do people think that they will be let off without anything happening to them or being tested in a way to determine their truthfulness when they claim to have faith just because they say: we have faith?"

It is said that it means:

> "Do people think that they will be let off and not afflicted with any tribulation just because they have said we have faith? Do they think that this faith entitles them to God's generosity such that nothing bad will ever happen to them?" This is unlikely, however, given the tenor of the verses around it.

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۖ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٣﴾

(29:3) ***Certainly We tested those who were before them. So Allah shall surely know*** **(la-yaʿlamanna)** ***those who are truthful, and He shall surely know*** **(la-yaʿlamanna)** ***the liars.***

Both of the *lāms* in this verse are for swearing an oath. *Certainly We tested those who were before them* is an adverb (*ḥāl*) for "people" in *Do the people suppose…* (28:2) or for the pronoun "they" in *…they will not be tested*? (28:2). In the first instance, the repudiation and rebuke is directed to their supposition that they will not be tested in spite of the divine habit of testing and trying [the people]; in the second, it is directed to their supposition that God would behave inconsistently by testing one people but not another. However, the first seems more suitable for the tenor.

It appears that *Certainly We tested those who were before them* means that testing and trying the people is a continuous habit for God; it happened to those who came before them and will happen to them too—one will not find any change in God's habit.

So Allah shall surely know those who are truthful…: This explains the rationale for what comes immediately before it. When God says He will "know" the truthful and the liars here, He means that He will make apparent the effects of their truthfulness or lying at the level of action through these tests and trials according to whether faith is truly established

in their hearts or not. The happiness that results from the faith to which they are called, and also the divine reward, only results from the reality of faith that has apparent effects such as patience in the face of hardships, persistence in obeying God and steadfastness in avoiding sins, not from the mere claim of faith.

And perhaps "knowledge" here refers to God's knowledge as a divine act (*al-ʿilm al-fiʿlī*)[1] which is identical with objective fact (*nafs al-amr al-khārijī*), for such facts are themselves a level of God's knowledge. As for His essential knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-dhātī*), this does not depend on any kind of testing whatsoever.

This renders the meaning: Do they think that they will be left alone without being tested just because they claim to have faith and make an outward show of it, when testing people is Our habit which applied to those who came before them too? It is necessary to distinguish the truthful from the liars by bringing to light the practical effects of the former's truthfulness and of the latter's deception, which corresponds to faith abiding in the hearts of the first group and its false simulacra being erased from the hearts of the latter.

Regarding the transition (*iltifāt*) to the name *Allah* in *So Allah shall surely know*…, it is said that this is used to inspire awe and teach veneration. It appears that it is used in similar situations to evoke a kind of rationale for what is being said. In this case, the rationale is that the calling and guiding to faith, and the divine reward that awaits for it, all return to the Being named *Allah*, from Whom all things begin, by Whom all things subsist, and to Whom all things return in their reality. It is because God has such a quality and position that true faith must be distinguished in His sight from empty claims. The fact of the matter must cannot remain in a state of ambiguity to Him, but must manifest. This is why instead of saying "So We shall surely know…" He says *So Allah shall surely know.*

أَمْ حَسِبَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ أَنْ يَسْبِقُونَا ۚ سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(29:4) ***Or do those who commit misdeeds suppose that they can outmaneuver Us? Evil is the judgement that they make.***

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1 This means knowledge (*ʿilm*) as one of the divine attributes of act (*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*) as opposed to knowledge as one of the divine attributes of essence (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*). (Trans.)

Or (*am*) is disjunctive. *Those who commit misdeeds* are the polytheists who persecuted the faithful and barred them from God's way, just as the meaning of "the people" in *Do the people suppose* (29:2) are those who said: "We have faith…" while they are renouncing their faith out of fear of persecution or harassment.

According to the tenor of the verses, *that they can outmanuever Us* means to overcome and thwart God by persecuting the faithful and barring them from God's way.

Evil is the judgement that they make declares erroneous the supposition that they can outmaneuver God with their scheming to persecute and obstruct the faithful, for this in itself is actually a trial from God for them that will bar them from the way to happiness. After all, an evil scheme will only harm the ones who make it.

It is said: The verse is intended as a rebuke to the sinful believers and it is they who are meant by *those who commit misdeeds*. "Misdeeds" here means the sins they commit other than polytheism (*shirk*). However it is obvious that the tenor of the verses does not match this meaning.

It is said: *Commit misdeeds* is more general than polytheism or any other sin. Therefore, this verse is general and there is no need to restrict it only to polytheism or only to sins other than polytheism.

However, the meaning of this verse insofar as it occurs in a specific context is one matter, and its meaning when read in isolation is something else entirely. What determines the first meaning is how the verse fits in with the overall goals of the sūrah as we have discussed above, whereas the second meaning is determined by reading the verse as a general statement, and there is no problem with it in that case.

مَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو لِقَاءَ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ لَآتٍ ۚ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٥﴾
وَمَنْ جَاهَدَ فَإِنَّمَا يُجَاهِدُ لِنَفْسِهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَغَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦﴾ وَالَّذِينَ
آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَحْسَنَ
الَّذِي كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

(29:5-7) ***Whoever expects to encounter Allah, Allah's time will indeed come, and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing. Whoever strives, strives only for his own sake. Indeed Allah has no need of the creatures. As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds,***

We will absolve them of their misdeeds, and We will surely reward them by the best of what they used to do.

So far, God has rebuked the people for trivializing the matter of faith and retreating from it at the slightest persecution or harassment by the polytheists, and He has rebuked the polytheists for persecuting and harassing the faithful and barring them from the way of God desiring to put out God's light and thwart His will. Both groups were shown to be mistaken in their suppositions.

Now, God returns to expound the inescapable truth and inevitable necessity. In these three verses [29:5-7], He explains that whoever has faith in God will expect to return to Him and encounter Him, so He will know that this time is coming without doubt and that God hears his speech, and knows his conditions and his deeds. Therefore he will be vigilant and will believe with a true faith that no persecution or harassment could turn him aside from, and he will strive for the sake of God in a manner worthy of Him, and he will know that the only one who benefits from this striving is himself as God has no need of his faith or that of any other member of the worlds. What's more, he will know that if he believes in God and does righteous deeds, then God will forgive him for his misdeeds and recompense him for the best of his acts. The latter two varieties of knowledge serve to strengthen and reaffirm the first kind; they will make him cling to faith and remain steadfast in the face of persecution and trials beside God.

Whoever expects to… signals that the discourse has returned to explaining the state of one who says *I have faith…* as, if there is any truth to this claim, he will expect to return to God on the Day of Resurrection. After all, were it not for the Resurrection, there would be no purpose for religion in the first place. So *Whoever expects to encounter Allah* actually means "Whoever has faith in God…" or "Whoever says: I have faith in God…" So this sentence is a case of using the cause in place of the effect.

"Encountering God" (*liqāʾ allāh*) means when a servant stands in a station where there is no veil between him and his Lord, as will be the case on the Day of Resurrection which is the arena in which the realities will become manifest. God says: *…and they shall know that Allah is the Manifest Reality* (24:25).

It is said:

(1) "Encountering God" refers to the Resurrection.

(2) It means arriving in the afterlife; encountering the Angel of

Death, accounting and recompense.

(3) "Encountering God" means God's recompense, whether reward or punishment.

(4) It means encountering His judgement on the Day of Resurrection.

In some of the aforementioned interpretations, "to expect" (*rajāʾ*) takes on the meaning "to fear" (*khawf*). However all of these interpretations are figurative and far from the original meaning; there is no need for them unless they are explaining the corollaries of the verse's original meaning.

Allah's time will indeed come: "Time" (*ajal*) means the deadline for the repayment of a loan or the like thereof, although it can also be used for the entire duration of a loan. However, the first meaning is more common.

Allah's time then is the deadline which God has set for mankind to encounter Him and it is coming without doubt. This statement has been given the utmost emphasis and, because this deadline—which is the Day of Resurrection—is a thing foreordained, this means there should be no lenience about it, nor should anyone disregard having true faith in God or remaining steadfast in the face of persecution and trials and not forsaking their religion and turning apostate. This is further emphasized by the words *and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing* because if He hears their speech and knows their states, no one should say "I have faith in God" unless they are speaking from the heart and are prepared to endure every trial and tribulation.

Hence it is clear that the rest of the verse is a case of using the cause in the place of its effect, the same as its opening *Whoever expects to encounter Allah*… The original meaning is: "Whoever says: I have faith in God, then let him say it directly, with a determination to hold fast to it and ready to struggle for the sake of his Lord."

Whoever strives, strives only for his own sake. Indeed Allah has no need of the creatures: "To strive" (*mujāhada* and *jihād*) is the emphatic form of *jahd*, which means "to expend energy." This is a reminder for them that their striving for God as required by their faith and their steadfastness in the face of the resultant hardships are not for the benefit of God, such that they can safely ignore it with regards to themselves. Rather, these actions are to their own benefit because God has no need of the creatures. Therefore they should hold fast to their faith and endure difficulties for its sake.

Whoever strives, strives only for his own sake serves to emphasize the argument of the previous verse, and *Indeed Allah has no need of the creatures* explains the rationale of what comes before it.

The transition from speaking in the third-person to the name *Allah* in both verses is akin to the transition we have already seen in the verse: *So Allah shall surely know those who are truthful…* (29:3).

As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, We will absolve them of their misdeeds and We will surely reward them by the best of what they used to do: This verse [29:7] depicts the ultimate outcome of their true faith accompanied by their striving for the sake of God. It illustrates how their faith benefits them rather than God and that it is actually a gift and a blessing from Him. With this in mind, the verse appears to suggest that "striving for God" is faith and righteous deeds, as this is the meaning given by the substitution of *And whoever strives…* (29:6) in the previous verse with *those who have faith and do righteous deeds* in this one.

To "absolve misdeeds" (*takfīr al-sayyiʾāt*) means to forgive them and the original meaning of *kufr* is to cover. Some say that "absolving misdeeds" means replacing their previous disbelief (*kufr*) with faith and replacing their previous acts of disobedience with acts of obedience; however, this is not correct.

Rewarding them with *the best of what they used to do* means to elevate them to the level that befits their best deeds. Alternatively, it could mean there will be no dispute about their deeds when they are held to account. This means that although some of their deeds have blemishes and deficiencies, each of their deeds will be treated as though it was done in the best way possible. So their prayer will be considered the best prayer, even if it contains some deficient aspects. And so on.

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حُسْنًا ۖ وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا ۚ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨﴾

(29:8) ***We have enjoined man to be good to his parents. But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them.***

To "enjoin" (*tawṣiyya*) means "to take a pledge," but here it means "a divine command."

Here, the word "good" (*ḥusnan*) is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) used in

the sense of an adjective (*ṣifa*), taking the place of an omitted absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*), the meaning being: "We have enjoined the human to being kind to his parents, a good enjoining" or "an enjoining endowed with goodness." In other words, we commanded him to be good to them. This is like when God says: "…and speak kindly to people…" (*wa qūlū li al-nās husnan*, 2:83), which means to say good things to them. It is also possible that the verbal noun has been placed in the position of an adjective for hyperbole, as we might do when saying: "Zayd is just" by using the verbal noun "justice" (*ʿadl*) instead of the adjective *ʿādil*. And there could be other interpretations too.

But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner… is an addendum to the above instruction. Here, God speaks directly to the human being to forbid him from obeying his parents should they invite him to associate partners with Him. The reason for this is that *tawṣiyya* has been used as a command, so it is as if to say: "We told the human being: Be good to your parents, but if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them."

God does not say "And that he should not obey them if they urge him to associate partners with Me…" in the third-person because directly addressing the human being is more explicit and removes ambiguity. That is why He also says *…to ascribe to Me…* using the singular first-person pronoun, so grasp this! In essence, the meaning of the sentence is: "We forbade him from associating partners with us in obedience to them and we removed all ambiguity about this."

…that of which you have no knowledge… alludes to the reason for the prohibition on obeying them, namely that their urging you to associate a partner with God by worshiping some other deity is an invitation to embrace ignorance (*jahl*), and worshiping that of which you have no knowledge is to invent a lie against God. God has forbidden people from following anything other than knowledge, saying: *Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge.* (17:36) And it is in this regard that God appends the words *To Me will be your return, whereat I will inform you concerning that which you used to do.* In other words, I will inform you of the significance of your deeds, including your worshiping of idols and associating partners with God.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: "We bade the human being a good bidding towards his parents—and we commanded him to treat them

kindly—but if they try to urge you to associate partners with Me, do not obey them because this is to follow that which you have no knowledge of."

And this verse, as we have already pointed out, contains a subtle rebuke to some of those who had believed only to give up their faith at their parent's urging.

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ فِي الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٩﴾

(29:9) ***Those who have faith and do righteous deeds, We will surely admit them among the righteous.***

The meaning of this verse is clear. Its occurrence after the previous verse and in this context signifies a beautiful promise by God and a reassurance for the heart of those believers who have been tried through having parents who associate partners with God and urge them to do likewise but disobeyed them and separated from them. God says: "If they urge him to associate partners with Me but he disobeys them and separates from them and they lose him as a result, there is no problem with that, for We shall provide him with something better than them and admit him amongst the righteous on account of his faith and righteous deeds." And the righteous (*ṣāliḥūn*) are the servants (*ʿibād*) blessed with paradise, as God says elsewhere: *O soul at peace! Return to your Lord, pleased, pleasing! Then enter among My servants! And enter My paradise!* (89:27–30).

There is a view that it refers to a righteous society in this world, but this does not match the context.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَقُولُ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ فَإِذَا أُوذِيَ فِي اللَّهِ جَعَلَ فِتْنَةَ النَّاسِ كَعَذَابِ اللَّهِ وَلَئِنْ جَاءَ نَصْرٌ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّا كُنَّا مَعَكُمْ ۚ أَوَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَعْلَمَ بِمَا فِي صُدُورِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠﴾ ﴿٣﴾

(29:10) ***Among the people there are those who say: We have faith in Allah; but when such a one is tormented in Allah's cause, he takes persecution by the people for Allah's punishment. Yet if there comes any help from your Lord, they will say for sure, We were indeed with you. Does not Allah know best what is in the breasts of the creatures?***

Because the faith of these people is contingent upon their well-being

and safety and erased by persecution and hardship, God does not call it "faith" (*īmān*) in an unqualified sense. He does not say: "Among the people are those who have faith…" Rather He says: *Among the people there are those who say: We have faith in Allah…*, so in one respect this verse is similar to the verse: *And among the people are those who worship Allah on an edge: if good fortune befalls him, he is content with it; but if an ordeal visits him he makes a turnabout* (22:11).

…but when such a one is tormented in Allah's cause (ūdhiya fī allāh)… meaning if he is tormented because of his faith in God as *fī* is used here for causation (*sababiyya*), as some have said. And there is a delicate point being made here, as God makes "faith in Him" a receptacle (*ẓarf*) for torment and for those who are tormented, to show that this torment is ascribed to Him in the same way as to a container is ascribed its contents, and this correlates to the meaning of a cause (*sabab*) or purpose (*gharaḍ*). We can see a similar device operating in the verses: *Alas for my negligence in the vicinage of Allah!* (39:56) and *As for those who strive in Us…* (29:69).

It is said: The meaning of "torment in God" is tormented in the way of God (*fī sabīl allāh*). It appears as though this reading rests on the understanding of an implicit possessive construct in the verse.

However, the problem with this reading is that it is at odds with the concern of the discourse; the reason they are being tormented *in Allah* is purely because of their faith in God and their saying: "Our Lord is Allah." On the other hand, being tormented "in the way of God" means being tormented because of their behavior (*sulūk*), which is the religion, as God says elsewhere: *…So those who migrated and were expelled from their homes, and were tormented in My way…* (3:195). One piece of evidence for the distinction between the two outlooks is what God says at the end of this sūrah: *As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways* (29:69), as striving "in God" is made a means of being guided to His ways (*subul*), and if striving "in God" were the same as "striving in the way of God," this would not be correct.

…he takes persecution by the people for Allah's punishment: It means: He tries to avoid the torment and harassment he suffers from people as though he was trying to avoid the punishment of God, forsaking his faith and returning to polytheism out of fear and apprehension of their persecution. However, their torment is fleeting and ends with either escape or death. This cannot be compared to the awesome punishment that God

metes out for all eternity and from which follows everlasting ruin.

Yet if there comes any help from your Lord, they will say for sure, We were indeed with you: It means: if there comes any relief or ease for you from God after the hardship and severity you suffered at the hands of His enemies, those people will say to you: "We were with you, so we should have a share of it too!"

***They will say for sure* (layaqūlunna):** The *ḍamma* on the [final] *lām* is for the plural, and the pronoun "they" refers to "those" (*man*) in *Among the people are those who say…* at the beginning of the verse. This is with regards to the meaning of *man* (as it is grammatically singular), and the singular pronouns refer to it with regards to the word itself (as it is semantically plural).

Does not Allah know best what is in the breasts of the worlds? This is a rhetorical question which rejects their claim to be faithful on the basis that God knows best what is in their hearts and that their hearts do not contain faith.

Worlds (ʿālamīn) means the communities of human beings, the communities of various rational creatures, human or otherwise (such as the jinn and angels), and if it refers to all living creatures, whether aware or not, then the meaning of "breasts" (*ṣudūr*) is "cores" (*bawāṭin*), but this is unlikely.

وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ ﴿١١﴾

(29:11) ***Allah shall surely know those who have faith, and He shall surely know the hypocrites.***

This belongs to the conclusion of the above verse, in other words: "With that, God can distinguish between the faithful and the hypocrites through testing and trials."

This verse also alludes to the fact that those [who renounced their faith] are hypocrites and that is because their faith is contingent the absence of it being tested while they make a show of it being absolute and without limitation. However, testing the faithful is a divine habit which cannot be avoided.

It has been argued based on these two verses that this sūrah, or at least these verses of it, are Medinan. This is because the verse speaks about hypocrisy and hypocrisy only appeared in Medina after the migration.

On the other hand, in Mecca before the migration, Islam had no power, the Muslims were weak, subjugated and suffering persecution, and the Prophet had no nobility or prominence in Arab society, especially amongst the Quraysh. With this in mind, what could possibly motivate someone to make a show of faith while he actually disbelieved? After all, God says in the previous verse: *Yet if there comes any help from your Lord, they will say for sure, We were indeed with you* (29:10). This help means victory and spoils, and this took place in Medina, not Mecca.

Like these two verses is the verse *Whoever strives, strives only for his own sake* (29:6). Again, this must necessarily be Medinian because fighting and *jihād* only took place in Medina after the migration.

This opinion is ill-considered for several reasons. Firstly, the discussion of hypocrisy (*nifāq*) that arises in this verse is a textbook example of hypocrisy; they claim "We have faith in God" but when they are tormented for their faith, they forsake it. This obviously could have happened as readily in Mecca as elsewhere but, in fact, the mention of torment and persecution could only refer to the situation of the Muslims in Mecca as this did not exist in Medina after the migration.

Secondly, God's assistance (*naṣr*) is not limited only to conquest and spoils; it has many other instances in which God grants relief to His servants. However, the verse does not say anything to indicate this divine assistance has come to pass. When God says, …*but when such a one is tormented in Allah's cause, he takes persecution by the people for Allah's punishment. Yet if there comes any help from your Lord, they will say for sure, We were indeed with you* (29:10), this indicates that persecution and harassment have occurred because God introduces them with the particle "when" (*idha*), which signifies their occurrence. Conversely, the coming of God's help is introduced with the jussive conditional particle "if" (*in*), which signifies the possibility of something occurring rather than its actual occurrence.

As for the verse *Whoever strives*… (29:6), we have already seen that this means the struggle of the self (*jihād al-nafs*) rather than armed struggle against the disbelievers. So the truth is that there is nothing in any of these verses to indicate that any part of this sūrah was revealed in Medina.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّبِعُوا سَبِيلَنَا وَلْنَحْمِلْ خَطَايَاكُمْ وَمَا
هُمْ بِحَامِلِينَ مِنْ خَطَايَاهُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(29:12) ***The faithless say to the faithful: Follow our way and we will bear your iniquities. They will not bear anything of their iniquities. They are indeed liars.***

The faithless are the Meccan idolaters who persisted in disbelief from the first time they were invited to truth, and *the faithful* are those who believed in it from the first. *Follow our way and we will bear your iniquities* is an attempt to win the faithful over to their side and reassure them that if they do come back to polytheism and follow the way of the idolaters there will not be any negative consequences for them in any case; as if there is no iniquity in it, then there is no problem, and even if there is, they will bear responsibility for it on their behalf. This is why they did not say: "We will bear your iniquities if there are any" but instead made a categorical statement, saying they will bear all of their iniquities.

It is as though they mean to say: "Let us suppose that you following our way is a mistake, we will bear all the consequences for that on your behalf" or "…we will bear all your iniquities, including this one."

They will not bear anything of their iniquities: It is a rejection of their offer *we will bear your iniquities*. And this is a rejection surrounded by an argument, namely that if following the way of the idolaters and forsaking their faith in God is an iniquity then the iniquity in the eyes of God belongs to those who gave up. Transferring the responsibility for this iniquity from them to someone else is something that requires God's permission and consent, for it is He who will punish and requite them for that! So he states explicitly: *They will not bear anything of their iniquities*, and this negation includes all of their iniquities, not merely that of following the idolaters.

They are indeed liars because of their promise *we will bear your iniquities*, as this promise contains the implicit claim that their iniquities will be transferred to them if they agree to bear them, and that God will permit this.

وَلَيَحْمِلُنَّ أَثْقَالَهُمْ وَأَثْقَالًا مَعَ أَثْقَالِهِمْ ۖ وَلَيُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

(29:13) ***But surely they will carry their own burdens and other burdens along with their own burdens, and they will surely be questioned on the Day of Resurrection concerning that which***

they used to fabricate.

This verse continues the previous discussion rejecting the claim of the polytheists and serves as an addendum. In other words, they will not carry the actual iniquities of the faithful, as these belong to their doers. However, they will bear a burden similar to that of those who performed these iniquities without any weight being relieved from their doers; they will carry them in addition to their own burdens because they are not only astray (*ḍāll*) but have led others stray (*muḍill*) also.

This is verse is of a similar meaning to the verse: *that they may bear their entire burdens on the Day of Resurrection, along with some of the burdens of those whom they lead astray without any knowledge* (16:25).

…and they will surely be questioned on the Day of Resurrection concerning that which they used to fabricated: Their polytheism is a form of fabricating a lie against God, as is their claim to have the power to alleviate the sins of others and that God will allow them to do that.

Examining narrations

(1) Ibn ʿAbbās and ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr said: *Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt* was revealed in Mecca.[1]

(2) Ibn ʿAbbās said: *Sūrah al-ʿAnkabūt* was revealed in Medina.[2]

(3) Ibn Jurayj [Jarīḥ] said: The verse, *Do the people suppose…*was revealed about ʿAmmār b. Yāsir, who was persecuted due to [faith in] God.[3]

(4) Al-Shaʿbī says: The verses, *Alif, Lām, Mīm. Do the people suppose…* were revealed about people in Mecca who had accepted Islam. When the verse of migration was revealed, the Companions of God's Messenger in Medina wrote to them saying that their conversion to Islam would not be accepted until they emigrated. So those in Mecca set off for Medina, but the idolaters pursued them and detained them, so this verse was revealed. So the Companions wrote to them again saying "such and such a verse was revealed about you." They responded: "We will set off [to Medina] and if

1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Ḍarīs, al-Nuḥḥās, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil*.

2 *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, on the authority of *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*.

3 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*.

anyone follows us, we will fight them." So they set out, the idolaters pursued them and the two sides fought; some were slain and others were saved. Then the verse was revealed: *Then indeed your Lord, to those who migrated, after they were persecuted, and waged jihad and were patient—indeed, after that, your Lord will surely be all-forgiving, all-merciful* (16:110).[1]

(5) Qatādah said: *Among the people there are those who say: We have faith in Allah …and He shall surely know the hypocrites* (29:10–11). These verses were revealed about people whom the idolaters had [forcibly] returned to Mecca, and these ten verses are Medinan.[2]

(6) Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said concerning the verse *Among the people there are those who say: We have faith in Allah* (29:10): Hypocrites in Mecca who believed but returned to disbelief and polytheism when they were persecuted and tormented by the idolaters out of fear that harm would come to them. They made the punishment inflicted by people in this world like the punishment of God in the next.[3]

(7) Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ said: My mother said: "I will not eat food or drink water unless you disbelieve in Muḥammad!" So she stopped eating and drinking to the point that they had to force-feed her using a stick. Then the verse was revealed: *We have enjoined man to be good to his parents…* (29:8).[4]

(8) Al-Kalbī says: The verse *Among the people there are those who say…* (29:10) was revealed about ʿAyyāsh b. Abī Rabīʿa al-Makhzūmī. This is because he embraced Islam but feared his family, so he emigrated to Medina before the Prophet. His mother, Asmāʾ bt. Mukhrima b. Abī Jandal al-Tamīmī, swore that she would not eat or drink, nor wash her head, nor cover herself with a blanket until he returned to her. When her sons, Abū Jahl and Hārith b. Hishām (the maternal half-brothers of ʿAyyāsh), saw her distress, they set off after him until they came to Medina. There, they met

1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

2 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr.

3 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr.

4 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh.

him and told him what had happened. They remained with him until he took a pledge from them that they would not force him to renounce his faith and follow theirs—and his mother had gone three days before she ate and drank.

However, once they were clean of Medina, they seized him and bound him in manacles before each of them lashed him a hundred times until he renounced the religion of Muḥammad out of fear of another beating and said what he should not have said, then this verse came down. Ḥārith was the hardest on him, so ʿAyyāsh swore that if he ever found the opportunity outside of the Holy Sanctuary, he would surely strike his neck.

When they returned to Mecca, they remained a while. Then the Prophet and the faithful emigrated to Medina. ʿAyyāsh emigrated with them and his faith was sound. Then Ḥārith b. Hāshim embraced Islam and emigrated to Medina, but ʿAyyāsh was not present when he gave his pledge of allegiance to the Prophet Then, one day, ʿAyyāsh came upon him at Qabā and, not knowing he had converted, struck his neck. Someone told him that Ḥārith had converted, at which point ʿAyyāsh recoiled and began to weep. ʿAyyāsh went to the Prophet and told him what had happened, whereat the verse was revealed: *A believer may not kill another believer, unless it is by mistake* (4:92).[1]

Author's comment: The divergence of the various narrations regarding the occasion of these verses' revelation is plain to see, and we have already said that the tenor of these verses mark them out as being entirely Meccan in character.

(9) Muʿammar b. Khilād said: I heard Abū al-Ḥasan [Imam al-Riḍā] say: *Alif, Lām, Mīm. Do the people suppose that they will be let off because they say, We have faith, and they will not be tested* [yuftanūna]*?* (29:1–2) Then he said to me: "What is *fitna*?" I said: "May I be your sacrifice! Being tested (*fitna*) in religion!" He said: "They will be put into fire (*fitna*) as gold is put into fire." Then he said: "They will be purified as gold is purified."[2]

(10) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The meaning of *tested* is that they will suffer

1 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of "some of our companions," on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad.

tribulations in their persons and their possessions.[1]

(11) Al-Kalbī says concerning the verse …*or confound you as factions* … (6:65): When this verse was revealed, the Prophet stood up, performed ablutions thoroughly, got up and prayed properly, then asked God not to send punishment from above them, nor from beneath their feet, nor confound them as factions, nor to make some of them taste the violence of others. Then Gabriel descended, but he did not rule out the last two punishments. So the Prophet said: "O Gabriel! How shall my *umma* endure while they kill one another?" Then he stood up and repeated his supplication and the two verses came down: *Do the people suppose that they will be let off…* (29:2). He said: "There is no avoiding a test that will afflict the *umma* after its Prophet to determine the one who is truthful and the one who is a liar. For while revelation will be cut off, the sword will still remain. And the word will be disjointed until the Day of Resurrection."[2]

(12) Once a man stood up and asked Imam ᶜAlī: "Tell us about the test (*fitna*).[3] Did you ask the Messenger of God about it?" He replied: "When God sent down the verse *Do the people suppose that they will be let off because they say: We have faith, and they will not be tested?,*" I knew that the test would not befall us while God's Messenger was amongst us. I said: "O Messenger of God! What is this test of which God informs us?" He said: "O ᶜAlī! My *umma* will be tested after me."[4]

(13) Once a man asked Imam ᶜAlī about some verses of the Qur'an, including the verse, *Whoever expects to encounter Allah, Allah's time will indeed come…* (29:5). He said: "It means whoever believes that He shall be resurrected, then God's promise of reward and punishment is coming. Encountering God here is not through

1 *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*.

2 *Majmaᶜ al-Bayān*.

3 This question was especially pertinent to the time of Imam ᶜAlī, as the various civil wars that erupted between the Muslims were called *fitna*. Therefore the questioner is not asking for a theoretical explanation but rather is trying to understand the events unfolding in his own lifetime. (Trans.)

4 *Nahj al-Balāgha*.

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sight (*ruʾya*); encounter (*liqāʾ*) is the Resurrection. So know that whenever the Qur'an speaks about 'encountering God,' this means the Resurrection."[1]

Author's comment: He intends by this to negate a sensory apprehension of God or any explanation of the Qur'an in line with this meaning.

(14) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says regarding the verse, *Whoever expects to encounter Allah…*: Whoever likes to encounter God, its time will come. *Whoever strives…* against the pleasures and desires of his own self to avoid sinning *…strives only for his own sake. Indeed Allah has no need of the creatures* (29:6). *We have enjoined man to be good to his parents…* (29:8)—they are those who gave birth to him.

(15) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says regarding the verse, *The faithless say to the faithful: Follow our way and we will bear your iniquities* (29:12): "The faithless would say to the faithful: Be with us, for there is nothing for you to fear in the first place. If it is true, we will carry your sins for you! So God will punish them twice, once for their sins and once for the sins of others."

(16) Abū Jahl and the worthies of the Quraysh would meet people when they went to the Prophet, greet them and say: "Do you know he forbids alcohol, fornication and the ways of the Arabs? Come back to us and we will bear your burdens!" So the verse came down: *But surely they will carry their own burdens and other burdens along with their own burdens* (29:13).[2]

(17) Ḥudhayfah said: At the time of the Messenger of God, once a man asked for help, but no one gave him anything. Then someone gave him something, whereby others followed suit. The Prophet said, "Whoever establishes a good custom that is practiced [afterwards] will have the reward of his act and the reward of anyone who follows him, without reducing anything from their reward. And whoever establishes an evil custom that is practiced [afterwards] will have the burden of his act and the burden of anyone

1 *Al-Tawḥīd*, part of a longer hadith.

2 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah's *al-Muṣannaf* and Ibn al-Mundhir, on the authority of Ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah.

who follows him, without reducing anything from their burden."[1]

Author's comment: There are further narrations which convey the same meaning, some of which interpret the verse, *But surely they will carry their own burdens and other burdens along with their own burdens* (29:13)—in like manner.

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1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad.

Verses 14–40

Having mentioned at the beginning of the sūrah that testing people (*fitna*) is a divine habit (*sunna ilāhiyya*) which applied to nations past, God invokes the stories of seven previous prophets and their nations to illustrate this point: Noah, Abraham, Lot, Shuʿayb, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Moses. God tried and tested them; some were saved and others perished. In the first three stories, God mentions both those who were saved and perished together, while in the latter four He only mentions those who perished.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَلَبِثَ فِيهِمْ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ إِلَّا خَمْسِينَ عَامًا فَأَخَذَهُمُ الطُّوفَانُ وَهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(29:14) ***Certainly We sent Noah to his people, and he remained with them for a thousand-less-fifty years. Then the flood overtook them while they were wrongdoers.***

Majmaʿ al-Bayān says:

> "A flood (*ṭūfān*) means a great overflowing mass of water. It is called *ṭūfān* because it flows over (*yaṭūfu*) all parts of the land."

It is said that it is whatever covers a thing through its abundance and intensity, such as water, wind or darkness. However, it is most commonly used for water.

God says "a thousand-less-fifty years" rather than "nine-hundred and fifty years" to stress their quantity. The verse is clear that this "thousand-less-fifty-years" refers to the period in which Noah was preaching to his people, between the beginning of his mission and the time of the flood. So this differs from what we find in the Torah in its current form, namely that it is the length of his life. And we have already mentioned this in relation to his story in our commentary on Sūrah *Hūd*. The rest of the meaning is clear.

فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَأَصْحَابَ السَّفِينَةِ وَجَعَلْنَاهَا آيَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

(29:15) ***Then We delivered him and the occupants of the Ark, and made it a sign for all the worlds.***

In other words, we saved Noah and the occupants of the ark who rode upon it with him, and they are his family and a small number of believers who were not wrongdoers.

And made it a sign for all the worlds: It appears as though "it" here refers to the event of the flood or to their deliverance from it; as for the suggestion that it refers to the Ark, this is somewhat implausible. "The worlds" (*ʿālamīn*) refers to many different groups of people from later generations.

وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاتَّقُوهُ ۖ ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(29:16) ***And Abraham, when he said to his people: Worship Allah and be wary of Him. That is better for you, should you know.***

And Abraham, when he said to his people is semantically joined (*maʿṭūf*) to the word *Noah*, to render the meaning: "And we sent Abraham to his people [to say]…"

He said to his people: Worship Allah and be wary of Him: Based on the context of the forthcoming verses, this is an invitation to believe in divine unity and a warning of punishment, in which case the sentence implies that they should worship *only* God and be wary *only* of Him.

The idolaters do not worship God but rather worship other deities, claiming that God can only be worshiped by way of immediate causes in the cosmos which bring people near to Him, such as angels and jinn. And if he was worshiped, He alone would have been the object of worship without any partner. Therefore when he tells them: *Worship Allah and be wary of Him*, this is in the sense of being summoned to worship Him alone, even if no particles of exclusivity (*adāt al-ḥaṣr*) have been used.

إِنَّمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْثَانًا وَتَخْلُقُونَ إِفْكًا ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ لَكُمْ رِزْقًا فَابْتَغُوا عِندَ اللَّهِ الرِّزْقَ وَاعْبُدُوهُ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ ۖ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(29:17) ***In fact, instead of Allah you worship idols*** **(awthān)**, ***and you invent a lie*** **(ifk)**. ***Indeed those whom you worship besides Allah have no control over your provision. So seek provision from***

Allah, and worship Him and thank Him, and to Him you shall be brought back.

Awthān is the plural of *wathan*, meaning "idol." *Ifk* is something distorted in word or in deed.

In fact, instead of Allah you worship idols demonstrates the invalidity of worshiping idols and shows that the only real form of worship is worshiping God. *Idols* is left indefinite to indicate their weakness and that their supposed divinity is nothing more than an empty claim. In other words, "In fact, instead of God you worship idols which are such-and-such…"

This is why God follows the above sentence with the phrase *and you invent a lie*, meaning you concoct a falsehood by calling them gods and worshiping them, for there is a God who is worthy of worship but that is the One True God and not these idols.

Indeed those whom you worship besides Allah have no control over your provision: This explains why calling these idols gods and worshiping them is a lie. In short, you only worship these idols besides God, insofar as they are representations of angels and jinn that you claim bring you closer to God, in order to gain some benefit by propitiating them so that they guarantee your sustenance and provision. However, they do not have any control over your provision as it is only God who has this power; He is the one who sustains and maintains you because He created you and created your sustenance, and "control" (*mulk*) follows from creation and origination.

This is why God follows immediately by saying: *So seek provision from Allah, and worship Him and thank Him*…—in other words, ask God for your provision because He is the one who has control over it; do not worship your idols but worship God and give thanks to him for all the different kinds of provision and blessings He has already given you, as it is a moral duty to thank a benefactor for the benefit he brings.

…and to Him you shall be brought back: This explains why you should *worship Him and thank Him*. And this is why a normal conjunction (*ʿaṭf*) has not been used. This turns them from worshiping God for the sake of provision to worshiping Him because they will return to Him for judgement. After all, if there was no Resurrection, there would be no particular reason to worship God as things like a person's provision have their own material causes besides worship and offerings to God; a person's provision is not visibly increased or decreased by their faith or infidelity. However,

a person's happiness on the Day of Resurrection does vary according to whether they believed or not, and whether they worshiped and gave thanks or not. So the return to God must be the ultimate motivation to worship Him and give thanks to Him rather than seeking worldly provision and benefits.

وَإِنْ تُكَذِّبُوا فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أُمَمٌ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ ۖ وَمَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٨﴾

(29:18) ***And if you impugn, then nations have impugned before you, and the Messenger's duty is only to communicate in clear terms.***

It appears that this is part of Abraham's address to his people. Some commentators have said that this is God speaking to the Quraysh. However, this is unlikely.

The meaning of the conditional construct at the beginning of this verse is that you are expected to impugn God's messengers because it is almost a universal habit for all idolatrous nations; people have denied before you and you are merely the latest iteration of them. And, insofar as I am God's messenger, my only duty is to communicate His message to you in clear terms.

This could also mean that your condition of denial is like that of nations before you; their denial did not benefit them in the slightest when God's punishment came down upon them, nor did they thwart God upon the earth or in the heavens, and they had no helper or guardian besides God. And the same is true of you. The phrase *…and the Messenger's duty is only to communicate in clear terms* fits equally well with both interpretations.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا كَيْفَ يُبْدِئُ اللَّهُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿١٩﴾

(29:19) ***Have they not regarded how Allah originates the creation? Then He will bring it back. That is indeed easy for Allah.***

This verse and the four that follow it belong to an aside during the story in which God produces arguments for the Resurrection to dispel the deniers' scepticism about it. It is connected to the preceding verses insofar as the cornerstone of their impugning of the Messengers is their

denial of the Resurrection, as Abraham alludes to when he says: *…and to Him you shall be brought back, and if you impugn, then nations have impugned before you…*

They in *Have they not regarded…* refers to the deniers from all the nations, past, present and future. *Regarded* means in an intellectual rather than physical sense.

…how Allah originates the creation? Then He will bring it back: This sentence is the direct object (*mafʿūl*) for the verb *regarded* with *He will bring it back* in conjunction with *originates*. This is as opposed to those who say it is in conjunction with *Have they not regarded…* and the question is rhetorical, intended as a rebuke.

In short, this means: Do they not know how God originates and then brings back? In other words that these two acts are one and the same thing, namely the initiation (*inshāʾ*) of something that did not already exist. *That is indeed easy for Allah* alludes to the fact that what God shall bring back is what He has already originated. This responds to the notion of unlikelihood of the return, because it will be a second generation. If God's absolute power can bring something to existence in the first place, then it can certainly bring it back to existence after its initial origination. The return, in reality, is nothing more than moving the creation from one abode to another and settling those journeying towards Him in their final resting place.

Some have suggested that origination followed by bringing back refers to creating the first of something and then producing the like thereof after it has perished. However this is not correct because this argument would not be useful in support the Resurrection as this refers to bringing back the very entity itself after it has perished and not merely something like it.

قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانْظُرُوا كَيْفَ بَدَأَ الْخَلْقَ ۚ ثُمَّ اللَّهُ يُنْشِئُ النَّشْأَةَ الْآخِرَةَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

(29:20) ***Say: Travel over the land and then observe how He has originated the creation. Then Allah shall bring about the genesis of the Hereafter. Indeed Allah has power over all things.***

This verse and the three below instruct the Prophet to provide conclusive arguments to his opponents; he encourages them to travel in the land and see how God originates and initiates the Creation according to their

different temperaments, hues and appearances, without working from any prior example or being constrained by any limitation in their number or variety. This demonstrates that there is no limitation to God's power; He can produce another creation as readily as He produced this one. Therefore, this verse bears a similar meaning to the verse: *Certainly you have known the first genesis, then why do you not take admonition?* (56:62)

يُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَرْحَمُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۖ وَإِلَيْهِ تُقْلَبُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(29:21) ***He will punish whomever He wishes and have mercy on whomever He wishes, and to Him you will be returned.***

This is part of what the Prophet is instructed to say in the previous verse. It appears to be an exposition of the phrase …*bring about the genesis of the Hereafter*. When something "turns," this means its state or orientation is altered, such as turning it upside-down or inside-out; the latter meaning is appropriate for the verse *on the day when the secrets are examined* (86:9).

Exegetes have also explained "turned" as "returned." In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> "To turn" (*qalb*) means to be returned or sent back, so it means that you will be returned to life in the Hereafter whence none shall have control over what benefits or what harms save God.

This is a subtle interpretation, signifying the return to God, which means to stand utterly helpless before Him, whence there is no judgement except His. In which case, the verse shares its meaning with: …*and they will be returned to Allah, their real master, and what they used to fabricate will forsake them* (10:30).

In short, this verse means that the "genesis of the Hereafter" (*al-nashʾa al-ākhira*) is the creation in which God will punish whomsoever He wishes, meaning the wrongdoers, and have mercy on whomsoever He wishes, namely the others. And they will all be returned to Him, meaning that none will judge them save He.

وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ ۖ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

(29:22) ***You cannot thwart Him on the earth or in the sky, nor do***

you have besides Allah any guardian or any helper.

This verse is also part of what the Prophet is instructed to say to them. It depicts their state on the Day of Resurrection, just as the previous verse depicted God's state on that day.

You cannot thwart Him on the earth or in the sky: Meaning, on that Day you cannot thwart God whether by evading Him, escaping His dominion or hiding in the farthest reaches of the heavens or the earth. So this verse yields the same sense as *O company of jinn and humans! If you can pass through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then do pass through. But you will not pass through except by an authority*. (55:33)

It is said: This means "whoever is in the sky" (*man fī al-samā'*) but "whoever" was omitted because it is indicated by the context. The implicit meaning is: "You cannot thwart God upon the earth, nor can whoever is in the heavens thwart Him in the heavens."

However, this is unlikely and we do not accept that the context of the speech indicates this. And even if we assume this to be the case, it would have been sufficient to address the angels and jinn alongside the human beings by *taghlīb*.[1] This would mean: "You—O assembled creatures—cannot thwart Him in the earth or the sky!"

Nor do you have besides Allah any guardian or any helper: Meaning, "Today you have no guardian besides God to take care of your affairs and render you needless of God, nor do you have any helper who can help you, strengthen you and complete what you are lacking in power in order for you to win a victory against God."

So the verse, as you can see, negates any possibility of their overpowering God or thwarting Him whether by escaping Him or repelling His punishment, so they cannot free themselves—*You cannot thwart Him*—and nor can anyone else free them—*Nor do you have besides Allah any guardian*—and nor can they and anyone else combined prevent God from doing as He wills—*or any helper*.

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَلِقَائِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَئِسُوا مِنْ رَحْمَتِي وَأُولَٰئِكَ

1 *Taghlīb*: A rhetorical device whereby more than one species of referent is subsumed under a single heading. According to this interpretation God is speaking to men, angels and jinn, even though it appears that he is speaking only to men. (Trans.)

لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

(29:23) ***Those who deny the signs of Allah and the encounter with Him, those have despaired of My mercy, and for such there is a painful punishment.***

This is now addressed to the Prophet but not part of what he has been instructed to say in the previous verses (beginning with *Say: Travel over the land*…), and this is intended to inform him of the explicit truth with regards to those who will be wretched and perish on the Day of Resurrection, for this was left ambiguous in the above verse, *He will punish whomever He wishes and have mercy on whomever He wishes* (29:21).

One of the indications we have for this not being included in what the Prophet is instructed to say is the use of the demonstrative pronoun "those" (*ulāʾika*) twice in the verse. If this had been part of the Prophet's speech, he would have addressed them as "you" (*ulāʾikum*).

Another indication is the phrase *My mercy*, as saying: *those have despaired of My mercy* (rather than "they have despaired of God's mercy" in the third-person, as the context would suggest) not only conveys information but also gives a sense of affirmation. This explicitly identifies the ones who are going to be punished and this is supported by the repetition of the demonstrative pronoun *those* in the verse and the emphasis given by the tone of the verse.

Moreover, by singling out the Prophet for this information, God not only gives him reassurance but also declares those whom He is speaking about as unworthy of hearing such news while they do not believe.

The signs of Allah—based on the unconditional use of the word—refers to everything that points to monotheism, prophethood and the Resurrection, including the signs in the cosmos (*ayāt kawniyya*) and the prophetic miracles (*muʿjazāt nabawiyya*) such as the Qur'an. So denying God's signs in this general sense includes denying the Resurrection, hence rejecting *the encounter*—which refers to the Resurrection—is mentioned after denying God's signs in the form of mentioning a specific instance after a general category (*dhikr al-khāṣṣ baʿd al-ʿāmm*). This is done to demonstrate the importance of believing in the Resurrection, in that denying the Resurrection renders the question of the true religion pointless. And this is obvious.

Mercy (*raḥma*) means the opposite of punishment (*ʿadhāb*) and it is

used here in the sense of paradise. In fact, using "mercy" to refer to paradise recurs throughout the Qur'an, for example: *As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, their Lord will admit them into His mercy* (45:30) and *He admits whomever He wishes into His mercy* (76:31).

God says that they have *despaired* either because they are actually in a state of despair (they deny the existence of an afterlife so they have no hope for everlasting happiness or eternal bliss) or because this alludes to His irrevocable decree (*qaḍāʾ maḥtūm*) that no faithless person shall enter paradise.

Therefore, the verse means: "Those who deny God's signs which point to the true religion in general and the Resurrection in particular, those persons have despaired of God's mercy and of entering paradise and they shall have a painful punishment."

فَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا اقْتُلُوهُ أَوْ حَرِّقُوهُ فَأَنْجَاهُ اللَّهُ مِنَ النَّارِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(29:24) *But the only answer of his people was that they said: Kill him, or burn him. Then Allah delivered him from the fire. There are indeed signs in that for a people who have faith.*

This follows on from the opening of the story: *And Abraham, when he said to his people: Worship Allah and be wary of Him. That is better for you, should you know* (29:16).

The apparent meaning of—*they said: Kill him, or burn him* is that each option was put forward by a group of them when they discussed what they were going to do with him. *Kill* (qatl) meant by the sword or the like thereof, which would have been the first thing they suggested, although they eventually agreed to burn him, as God says elsewhere: *They said: Burn him, and help your gods, if you are to do [anything]!* (21:68) It is also possible that the hesitation represented by *or* meant they weren't sure what to do with him at first but then agreed he should be burnt.

Then Allah delivered him from the fire: Here the verse omits some details for the sake of brevity, namely that they decided to burn him, built a bonfire and hurled him into it, whereat God saved him. The story has been elaborated more fully in other parts of the Qur'an.

وَقَالَ إِنَّمَا اتَّخَذْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْثَانًا مَوَدَّةَ بَيْنِكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۖ ثُمَّ

يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكْفُرُ بَعْضُكُمْ بِبَعْضٍ وَيَلْعَنُ بَعْضُكُمْ بَعْضًا وَمَأْوَاكُمُ النَّارُ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(29:25) ***He said: You have taken idols besides Allah for the sake of [mutual] affection amongst yourselves in the life of the world. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will disown one another*** **(yakfur baʿḍukum bi baʿḍ)** ***and curse one another, and the Fire will be your abode, and you will not have any helpers.***

Insofar as there is no rational argument they could offer for taking up idols, they could only claim to be following the example of those whom they respected and held in esteem, such as sons following their fathers, subjects following their leaders, people following their friends or individuals following their community. These relationships are usually the basis upon which communal traditions are preserved and upheld.

In reality, following the tradition of idolatry is indicative of the death of a society, in which the masses see themselves as being a part of one another. Therefore, communal sentiments cause them to follow this tradition and it is following this tradition that preserves this communal sentiment amongst them and maintains their cohesion and unity.

This is the condition of the masses. However, the elite might rely on what they consider to be a rational basis for this, even though there is no such basis. For example, they might say: "God is too magnificent for human sense, imagination or reason to encompass. Therefore, we cannot worship Him directly and therefore, we must approach Him through intermediaries such as the angels or jinn, who will bring us nearer to Him or intercede with Him on our behalf."

When Abraham says *You have taken idols besides Allah for the sake of [mutual] affection amongst yourselves in the life of the world*, this is addressed to the masses of his people, because they have taken up idols for the sake of communal sentiments, in order to safeguard their worldly communal life. And this is how they responded when he asked them about their condition:

> *When he said to his father and his people: What are these images to which you keep on clinging? They said: We found our fathers worshiping them.* (21:52–52)
> *He said: Do they hear you when you call them? Or do they bring*

you any benefit, or cause you any harm? They said: Rather we found our fathers acting likewise. (26:72–74)

Hence it appears that when he says …*for the sake of [mutual] affection amongst yourselves*… it is possible for this phrase in the accusative case with an implicit proposition in front of it (*nazᶜ al-khāfiḍ*).[1] In this instance, the implicit proposition is a *lām* of causation, in which case *affection* (mawadda) is the reason for which they took up idols. It is also possible for this to be a purposive object (*mafᶜūlunlah*), such that *affection* was the goal that their taking up idols was supposed to achieve. However, the verse's coda only fits with the second possibility, as we shall see.

He follows *You have taken idols*… with …*Then on the Day of Resurrection you will disown one another and curse one another* to show them what will be the outcome of their adopting idols for the sake of this desired affection amongst themselves. This will become apparent on the Day on which secrets are disclosed. For now, they pursue this meagre enjoyment through idolatry, which is the worst sort of wrongdoing and the most ruinous kind of sin, and they agree upon it. However, the truth will become apparent to them and then they will disassociate from one another and rebuke one another.

Disown one another (yakfur baᶜḍukum bi baᶜḍ) actually means their idols disowning them, as we read in the verses: *No Indeed! Soon they will disown their worship, and they will be their opponents* (19:82); *and on the Day of Resurrection they will forswear your polytheism* (35:14). In the same vein is the fact that the leaders will disown those who follow them, as in the verse: *When those who were followed will disown the followers, and*

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1 *Nazᶜ al-khāfiḍ*: A term from the Kufan school of Arabic Grammar which means that there is an implicit preposition (*ḥarf jārr*) after a verb. For example, instead of saying "I passed by so-and-so" (*marartu bi fulānin*)—where the preposition interposes between the verb and noun, giving the noun following it a genitive declension (the *kasra*)—you say "I passed so-and-so" (*marartu fulānan*). The preposition is dropped and the verb takes the following noun as a direct object, giving it an accusative declension (the *fatḥa*). According to this theory, here the word "affection" (*muwaddatan*) actually means "for the sake of affection" (*li muwaddatin*), with the preposition *li* being omitted on the basis of this grammatical rule and "affection" becoming accusative as a result. (Trans.)

they will sight the punishment while all their means of recourse will be cut off (2:166). Conversely, *curse one another* means all of them cursing each other, as God says elsewhere: *Every time that a nation enters [hell], it will curse its sister* (7:38).

Then He says: *…and the Fire will be your abode, and you will not have any helpers.* This refers to the evil consequences of their deeds catching up with them and their recompense coming to pass—Hellfire, which is eternal ruin—while they have no one who can help them to repel this punishment; they had sought out mutual affection to help and support one another in this life, but on the Day of Resurrection this has caused enmity and opposition between them, which has led them to disown and forsake one another.

فَآمَنَ لَهُ لُوطٌ ۘ وَقَالَ إِنِّي مُهَاجِرٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي ۖ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٦﴾

(29:26) ***Thereupon Lot believed in him*** **(āmana lah)*****, and he said: Indeed I am migrating toward my Lord. Indeed He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.***

In other words, Lot believed in Abraham. The verb "believe" can become transitive with either the particle *bi* or the particle *li*, but the meaning remains the same.

…and he said: Indeed I am migrating toward my Lord: Some say that the pronoun "I" here refers to Lot. Others suggest that it refers to Abraham, as would be supported by the verse *He said: Indeed I am going toward my Lord, who will guide me* (37:99).

It appears that "migrating to God" means to migrate from his homeland, leave behind his idolatrous people and go to a place where there are no idolaters nor anyone else who will prevent him from worshiping his Lord. Therefore he considers this migration to be migrating to God, which is an abstract figure of speech (*majāz ʿaqlī*).

Indeed He is the All-mighty, the All-wise: Meaning, whoever He helps cannot be abased and whoever He protects will not go to waste.

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي ذُرِّيَّتِهِ النُّبُوَّةَ وَالْكِتَابَ وَآتَيْنَاهُ أَجْرَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا ۖ وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(29:27) ***And We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and We ordained***

among his descendants prophethood and the Book, and We gave him his reward in the world, and in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous.

The meaning of these lines is clear.

…and We gave him his reward in the world, and in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous.

"Reward" (*ajr*) is a recompense given to the doer of a deed. The difference between *ajr* (reward) and *ujra* (wage) is that the latter refers only to worldly recompense while *ajr* signifies recompense both of this world and the Hereafter. On the other hand, the difference between *ajr* and *jazāʾ* (recompense) is that the former is only used for good and beneficial things, while *jazāʾ* can be for things both good and bad, beneficial and harmful.

What we usually see in God's speech is that He uses the word *ajr* to signify a recompense which God has prepared for the believers in the Hereafter in return for their acts of worship. This includes stations of nearness to him and degrees of *wilāya*, including paradise itself. However, it also appears in the story of Joseph in the verse: *Indeed if one is Allah wary and patient Allah does not waste the reward of the virtuous.* (12:90) And in the verse: *That is how We established Joseph in the land that he may settle in it wherever he wished. We confer Our mercy on whomever We wish, and We do not waste the reward of the virtuous.* (12:56) In both of these cases, *ajr* is used to signify a good worldly reward.

Therefore, *…and We gave him his reward* [ajr] *in the world* could mean that He gave him a good worldly reward. However, the most appropriate reading is to see *in the world* connected with the reward rather than the act of giving. Perhaps this can be further affirmed by what God says about him elsewhere: *We gave him good in this world, and in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous* (16:122). The apparent meaning of "good" (*ḥasana*) in this verse is "a good life" and to "give" something means to have actually bestowed it on the recipient, not merely to have prepared and ordained it for them.

Another possibility is that this refers to him receiving those spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) reserved for the faithful in the Hereafter while still in this world. And the stations of Abraham have been fully elaborated in the commentary on his story in Sūrah al-Anʿām.

…and in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous: This has already been discussed in our commentary on the verse: *…and in the*

Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous (2:130).

وَلُوطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(29:28) ***And Lot, when he said to his people: You indeed commit an indecency none in the world has ever committed before you!***

Meaning: "And We sent Lot…" or "And mention Lot…" when he told his people: *You indeed commit an indecency…* informing them of the reason for his astonishment and rebuke. *Indecency* here means going to men for gratification.

…none in the world has ever committed before you! This is either a new sentence clarifying the meaning of *indecency* and emphasizes its meaning, as if to say this behavior never spread amongst any people before you in this manner, or the sentence is in the position of an adverbial qualifier (*ḥāl*) for the subject of the verb *commit* (i.e. *you*).

أَئِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ وَتَقْطَعُونَ السَّبِيلَ وَتَأْتُونَ فِي نَادِيكُمُ الْمُنْكَرَ ۖ فَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا ائْتِنَا بِعَذَابِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(29:29) ***What! Do you come to men, and cut off the way, and commit outrages in your gatherings? But the only answer of his people was that they said: Bring us Allah's punishment should you be truthful.***

This is a rhetorical question to express amazement, meaning that this is something no listener would believe or any rational person would accept, which is why the Arabic verse includes the *lām* and *nūn* of emphasis. The context indicates that *come to men* refers to sodomy and *cut off the way* means to utterly neglect the way of producing offspring, which is to go to women. This means *cut off the way* alludes to ignoring women and forgoing marriage to them. *Commit outrages in your gatherings* [nādīkum] (a "gathering" or *nādī* refers to a meeting in which they assemble together; it is not called a *nādiyya* unless a person's family are present) means to commit indecency or at least everything leading up to it in full public view.

It is said: *Cut off the way* means to attack travellers on the roads passing by their settlement and commit this indecency with passers-by. They did this by pelting travellers with stones from slingshots, and when one of them struck a traveller in this fashion, he was said to be entitled to his victim; they would rob them, rape them and then pay them three dirhams. Moreover they had a judge who decreed this.

It is also said that they would engage in brigandage in general, but it is obvious that the context suggests otherwise.

It is said: *Commit outrages in your gatherings* means that their gatherings were filled with all sorts of indecencies and sins, such as foul language, foolishness, gambling, throwing stones at passers-by, playing instruments, nudity and sodomy and the like thereof. However, you have seen what the context indicates.

But the only answer of his people was that they said: Bring us Allah's punishment should you be truthful: They mocked and derided him. However, their answer shows that he was warning them of God's punishment and God has said about his story elsewhere: *He had certainly warned them of Our punishment, but they disputed the warnings* (54:36).

قَالَ رَبِّ انْصُرْنِي عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(29:30) ***He said: My Lord! Help me against this corruptive lot.***

Here Lot prays for victory and invokes God's help against them; he calls them "corruptive" (*mufsidīn*) because of their actions which are causing corruption in the land, cutting off progeny and threatening to destroy humanity.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَىٰ قَالُوا إِنَّا مُهْلِكُو أَهْلِ هَٰذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ ۖ إِنَّ أَهْلَهَا كَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(29:31) ***And when Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, they said: We are indeed going to destroy the people of this town. Its people are indeed wrongdoers.***

This is an overview of the story of how Lot's people came to be destroyed, namely by sending angels. God sent these angels first to Abraham and there they gave his wife good news of Isaac and Jacob, before informing Abraham that they were on their way to destroy the people of

Lot. The Qur'an gives a fuller account of this in Sūrah Hūd and elsewhere.

They told Abraham: *We are indeed going to destroy the people of this town*. The fact that they use the demonstrative pronoun "this" to refer to the town—*this town*—suggests that it was close to the land in which Abraham resided, which was the Holy Land.

Its people are indeed wrongdoers explains that they are being destroyed because they are wrongdoers. In other words, the vice of wrongdoing has become firmly rooted in their character. Normally one would say "They are indeed wrongdoers" [using a pronoun, because they have just been mentioned a moment ago] but instead God explicitly mentions them again. This is to show that their wrongdoing is a kind specific to them, rather wrongdoing in general, and this is what has occasioned divine punishment. As if to say: "Its people, insofar as they are *its people*, are wrongdoers."

قَالَ إِنَّ فِيهَا لُوطًا ۚ قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ فِيهَا ۖ لَنُنَجِّيَنَّهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(29:32) ***He said: Lot is indeed in it. They said: We know better those who are in it. We will surely deliver him and his family, except his wife: she shall be one of those who remain behind.***

When Abraham said *Lot is indeed in it*, he meant for the punishment to be averted from the people of the town because Lot was amongst them. They responded that not only were they aware of this but that there were others in the town who would be spared punishment, namely his family excluding his wife.

However, when he said this, Abraham was not ignorant of the fact that God would not punish Lot, who was His own appointed prophet, even if the punishment encompassed everyone else in the town. Nor was it the case that he was startled or alarmed by God's violence against them. Rather, when he said *Lot is indeed in it*, he meant that Lot's stature should spare the people God's punishment, not that Lot himself needed to be spared from it. The angels respond that they have been bid to save him from amongst the inhabitants of his town and take his family with him, save for his wife who was destined to remain behind.

The evidence for what we have mentioned is what God has said in Sūrah Hūd regarding this aspect of the story: "So when the awe had left Abraham and the good news had reached him, he pleaded with Us

concerning the people of Lot. Abraham was indeed most forbearing, plaintive, [and] penitent. *O Abraham, let this matter alone! Your Lord's edict has certainly come, and an irrevocable punishment shall overtake them* (11:74–76)."

These verses make explicit that Abraham was intervening on behalf of Lot's people and not on behalf of Lot himself. However, Abraham's choice of words in the verse we are discussing make it seem as though he is defending Lot and therefore the messengers respond to the apparent meaning of his words by saying that they were not ignorant of Lot's presence therein; they know better who is in the town and they know that Lot and his family are not amongst those who are deserving of punishment so they will save him and his family except for his wife. However, what Abraham meant was that the people of the town should be spared punishment and he was told that this is an irrevocable decree, as we see in the verses from Sūrah *Hūd*.

And some commentators have had lengthy disagreements about the phrases *Its people are indeed wrongdoers* (29:31) and *Lot is indeed in it.* However, we have left these discussions aside because there is little benefit in them. Anyone who wishes to know more can refer to the longer works [of exegesis].

وَلَمَّا أَنْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ
وَلَا تَحْزَنْ ۖ إِنَّا مُنَجُّوكَ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَكَ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(29:33) ***And when Our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed on their account and in a predicament for their sake. But they said: Do not be afraid, nor grieve! We shall deliver you and your family, except your wife: she will be one of those who remain behind.***

The two instances of the plural pronoun *their* in *he was distressed on their account* (sīʾa bihim) *and in a predicament for their sake* (wa ḍāqa bihim dharʿan) refer to the messengers, and the *bāʾ* is causal (*bāʾ al-sababiyya*). In other words, they caused him worry and put him in a difficult situation. This was because they appeared in the form of two handsome young men and he feared his people would do them harm, and then his people sought to do harm to them and Lot found himself unable to protect them even though they were guests under his care.

But they said: Do not be afraid, nor grieve! In other words, you are in

no danger whatsoever. This is because fear is felt in response to potential harm, while grief is felt as the result of actual harm.

We shall deliver you and your family, except your wife: she will be one of those who remain behind: Meaning, she will remain behind in punishment; and this statement explains why Lot should not be afraid nor grieve.

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إِنَّا مُنْزِلُونَ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ هَٰذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ رِجْزًا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(29:34) ***We are indeed going to bring down upon the people of this town a punishment* (rijz) *from the sky because of the transgressions they used to commit.***

This is the explanation of the punishment alluded to when they said: *We shall deliver you and your family* from punishment. And *rijz* here is that punishment.

وَلَقَدْ تَرَكْنَا مِنْهَا آيَةً بَيِّنَةً لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(29:35) ***Certainly We have left of it* (taraknā minhā)** ***a manifest sign for a people who apply reason.***

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"It" here refers to the village.

To "leave" (*tark*) means to keep; that is, "We have kept it as a clear sign for people who apply reason that they might take a lesson from it and be wary of God." And what is left of it are the ruins that remained after the divine punishment befell it.

However, today the precise location of this settlement is not known to us and no trace of it remains. It has been suggested that the ruins were swallowed by water to make the Dead Sea. However, the verse is emphatic—as you can see—that its location was well-known and visible at the time the Qur'an was revealed. Clearer still are the verses *Indeed it is on a standing road* (15:76), and *And indeed you pass by them at dawn and at night. So do you not apply reason?* (37:137–138).

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وَإِلَىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَارْجُوا الْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَلَا تَعْثَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾ .

(29:36) ***And to Midian We sent Shuʿayb, their brother. He said: O my people! Worship Allah, and expect [to encounter] the Last***

Day, and do not act wickedly on the earth causing corruption.

He called them to worship God, meaning to believe in Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*), and to expect the Last Day, which is to believe in the Resurrection, and not to cause corruption in the land. The main way in which they caused corruption in the land, according to accounts that have been mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an, is that they tampered with the weights and scales in the marketplace.

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(29:37) ***But they impugned him, whereupon the earthquake* (rajfa)** ***seized them, and they lay lifeless prostrate* (jāthimīn)** ***in their homes.***

According to al-Rāghib, a *rajfa* is a violent shaking. *Jathm* and *juthūm* mean to sit in a place or kneel upon the ground, and this is a euphemism for death.

The verse means: "They denied Shuʿayb, so a severe earthquake seized them and left them dead and unmoving in their homes."

In another part of the Qur'an, we read of their story: *And the Cry seized those who were wrongdoers, whereat they lay lifeless prostrate in their homes* (11:94), and this suggests that they were destroyed by both a cry and a quaking.

وَعَادًا وَثَمُودَ وَقَدْ تَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ مِنْ مَسَاكِنِهِمْ ۖ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ وَكَانُوا مُسْتَبْصِرِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(29:38) ***And ʿAd and Thamud, [whose fate] is evident to you from their habitations. Satan made their deeds seem decorous to them, thus he barred them from the way [of Allah], though they used to be perceptive.***

Here, the tone of the verses shifts, as while the above stories of nations past began by mentioning their prophets, like Noah, Abraham, Lot and Shuʿayb, this verse begins by mentioning ʿAd and Thamud, and the next verse by mentioning Korah, Pharaoh and Haman.

And ʿAd and Thamud are accusative (*manṣūb*) due to an implicit verb whose meaning is: "And remember ʿAd and Thamud."

Satan made their deeds seem decorous to them, thus he barred them from the way, though they used to be perceptive: Satan making their deeds seem decorous to them is a metaphorical way of saying that he made them like their evil deeds and engendered in them an attachment to those deeds; barring them from the way means that he turned them aside from the way of God, which is the way of human nature (*fiṭra*). This is why some have said *though they used to be perceptive* means that beforehand they used to follow simple human nature.

However, the apparent meaning, as we have said with regards to the verse *Mankind were a single community; then Allah sent the prophets…* (2:213), is that the time during which people followed simple human nature was before Noah was sent to his people. However, ʿAd and Thamud came after Noah. Therefore, their being perceptive before they were barred from the way means that they lived in the worship of God and the faith of Divine Unity which is the religion of human nature.

وَقَارُونَ وَفِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ ۖ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مُوسَىٰ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا كَانُوا سَابِقِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(29:39) ***And Korah, Pharaoh, and Haman. Certainly Moses brought them manifest proofs, but they acted arrogantly in the land; though they could not outmaneuver.***

They could not outmanuever is a metaphorical way of saying that they could not defeat God. The remainder of the verse is clear in its meaning.

فَكُلًّا أَخَذْنَا بِذَنْبِهِ ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِ حَاصِبًا وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ أَخَذَتْهُ الصَّيْحَةُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ خَسَفْنَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ أَغْرَقْنَا ۚ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَٰكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(29:40) ***So We seized each for his sin: among them were those upon whom We unleashed a rain of stones*** **(ḥāṣib)**, ***and among them were those who were seized by the Cry, and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow, and among them were those whom We drowned. It was not Allah who wronged them, but it was they who used to wrong themselves.***

So We seized each for his sin—meaning that We seized each of the previous nations for its sin. Then God details the different ways in which He did this: *among them were those upon whom We unleashed a rain of stones—ḥāsib* means stones, though it has been said that this is a wind carrying pebbles; in the first instance this refers to the people of Lot, in the second instance it refers to the people of ʿAd—*and among them were those who were seized by the Cry*—the peoples of Thamud and Shuʿayb—*and among them were those whom We caused the earth to swallow*—Korah—*and among them were those whom We drowned*—the people of Noah, and Pharaoh, Haman and their people.

Then God looks at all of the above accounts and the punishments and fates that befell those nations, and draws a general conclusion that whatever He caused to befall them was not an injustice on His part but rather the result of their own wrongdoing; *It was not Allah who wronged them, but it was they who used to wrong themselves.* In other words, God recompensed them for their wrongdoing because this abode is a place of trial and tribulation; and this trial is a divine habit which cannot be averted. So whoever is guided is guided for his own sake, and whoever goes astray it is only because of himself.

Examining narrations

(1) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The fifth sense of *kufr* is to disown one another (*barāʾa*), as in the verse: *He said: You have taken idols [for worship] besides Allah for the sake of affection amongst yourselves in the life of the world. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will disown one another and curse one another…* (29:25).[1]

(2) Imam ʿAlī said: *Kufr* in this verse means to disown; they disown one another. A similar verse can be found in Sūrah Ibrāhīm, in which Satan is quoted as saying: *Indeed I disavow your taking me for Allah's partner aforetime* (14:22). And Abraham's own words: *We disavow you…* (60:4).[2]

(3) The Prophet forbade slinging stones at people (*khadhf*), which

1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū ʿAmr al-Zubayrī, in a narration where the Imam discusses the different senses of the word *kufr* (disbelief, ungratefulness).

2 *Al-Tawḥīd*, part of a longer tradition where the Imam answers some questions about apparent contradictions in the verses of the Qur'an.

is God's saying: *and commit outrages in your gatherings* (29:29).[1]

(4) Umm Hānī b. Abī Ṭālib said: I asked God's Messenger about the verse: *and commit outrages in your gatherings* (29:29) and he said: They would sit by the side of the road and throw stones at travellers and mock them.[2]

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Abraham said to the angels: Why did you come?
They said: "To destroy Lot's people."
"If there are a hundred believers therein, will you destroy them?"
Gabriel said: "No."
"And if there are fifty?"
"No."
"And if there are thirty?"
"No."
"And if there are twenty?"
"No."
"And if there are ten?"
"No."
"And if there are five?"
"No."
"And if there is only one?"
"No."
"But Lot is there!"
They said: "We know better those who are in it. We will surely deliver him and his family, except his wife: she shall be one of those who remain behind."[3]
[Imam al-Ṣādiq continued] Al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī said: "I know not this saying except that he was seeking to have them spared. This is God's saying: *He pleaded with Us concerning the people of Lot* (11:74)."

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1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Jābir.

2 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of several collections of hadith.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Zayd al-Ḥammād, part of a narration about the angels descending to Abraham with good news.

Verses 41–55

These verses contain an addendum to the story of those past nations who perished. This is in the form of a parable God strikes for these nations having taken up guardians besides Him, in which it becomes clear that what they have built is the frailest of edifices; the creation of the heavens and the earth proclaims its hollowness and falsity, and that they have no guardian besides Him, as this scripture shall declare.

Then, the topic shifts to command the Prophet to recite this scripture that has been revealed to him, to establish the prayer, to invite the People of the Book to Islam with soft words and goodly disputation. And also to respond to the idolaters' impudent demands that the Prophet bring them signs other than the Qur'an or to give them the punishment of which he has forewarned them.

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتًا ۖ
وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ الْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ ۖ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

(29:41) ***The parable of those who take guardians instead of Allah is that of the spider*** **(ʿankabūt)** ***that takes a home, and indeed the frailest of homes is the home of a spider, had they known!***

A "spider" is a well-known creature, and the word *ʿankabūt* can be used for one or many, and male or female.

The concern in the verse, *The parable of those who take…*, is taking guardians beside God, which is why the relative pronoun (*mawṣūl*) has been used, and the concern in *…is that of the spider that takes a home…* is taking a home. The underlying meaning here is that the quality (*ṣifa*) of the idolaters when they take-up guardians besides God is the same as the quality of a spider when it takes a home, and this is a description signified by the fact that *a home* (*baytan*) is left indefinite.

In which case, the words *…and indeed the frailest of homes is the home of a spider…* elucidate the quality of this house which the spider has taken. Notice that God does not say, "and indeed it has the frailest of homes" as we might expect. This is because the sentence is being used as

a current proverb, which therefore does not alter depending on its grammatical context.

The meaning then, is that their taking-up guardians besides God, namely their gods to whom they entrust their affairs, is like a spider taking a home which is the frailest of homes, as it bears no semblance to a home save in its name; it neither repels heat nor cold, nor does it endure or protect its occupant from harm. In the same manner, whatever guardianship (*wilāya*) their guardians might have is in name alone, for they bring neither benefit nor harm, nor do they hold power over life, death or resurrection!

The subject of this parable is, of course, that the idolaters have taken up gods other than God. But the reason God refers to them as "guardians" (*awliyāʾ*) and not "gods" (*āliha*) is because this intimates the reason that led them to take up these gods in the first place; namely, the claim that they exercise some kind of authority over their affairs and look after them by bringing them good, protecting them from evil and interceding on their behalf.

In addition to furnishing us with this point, the meaning of the verse—taken in its most absolute sense—applies to anyone who takes, in any matter or affair, whatever it may be, a guardian besides God to whom he entrusts his affairs and whom he sees as having some effect which he hopes to obtain, even if he does not consider this guardian an idol. This is unless he sees this guardianship as ultimately falling beneath the umbrella of God's guardianship, as is the case with the *wilāya* of God's Messenger, the Imams and the faithful in general, as God says: *And most of them do not believe in Allah without ascribing partners to Him* (12:106).

…had they known!—meaning, had they known that their parable was like that of a spider, they would not have taken guardians besides God. This is what some have said.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٤٢﴾

(29:42) ***Allah indeed knows whatever thing they invoke besides Him* (mā yadʿūna min dunihi min shayʾin)*, and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.***

It is possible that the *mā* in *mā yadʿūna* could either be (i) a relative pronoun (*mawṣūl*, that is, "what"), (ii) a particle of negation (*nāfiya*,

that is, "not"), (iii) an interrogative particle (*istifhām*) or (iv) infinitive (*maṣdariyya*). In which case, *min* from *min shayʾin* is superfluous for emphasis (*zāʾid li al-taʾkīd*) in the second instance, and for elucidation (*tabyīn*) in all others. The two most likely readings are the first two (i and ii) and of these, it is the first that is preponderant.

According to the second reading, the verse means that God knows they are not invoking anything real besides Him; in other words, the gods they worship are completely unreal. In which case, as the author of *al-Kashshāf* has said, this verse underscores the above parable, in that it declares what they call upon besides him to be nothing.

According to the first reading, the verse means that God knows what they invoke besides Him, in which case this intimates that the parable He strikes for it above is apt and that therefore these guardians have guardianship in name alone.

This meaning is emphasized by the use of the two divine names, All-mighty (*al-ʿazīz*) and All-wise (*al-ḥakīm*), at the end of the verse. This is because God is the All-mighty whom none can overcome and therefore in whose dominion none has a share, just as none has any share in His creation and origination. And He is the All-Wise whose actions and governance are always proficient and, therefore, He does not delegate the governance of His creation to anyone else. This is like a preliminary to what will be expounded in the verse: *Allah created the heavens and the earth with reason* (29:44).

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ ۖ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(29:43) ***And We draw these parables for mankind; but no one grasps them except those who have knowledge.***

This refers to all of the parables struck in the Qur'an, insofar as they are universal and reach the ears of all people. However, it is only those with knowledge who grasp the realities of things and do not become ensnared in appearances who attain their deepest meanings and loftiest lessons. This is shown by the fact God says *but no one grasps them* instead of "but no one believes in them" or something similar.

People receive the parables struck in the Qur'an according to their different levels of understanding; some hear them but gain nothing except the sound of the words and their most basic meanings, without penetrating

to their depths; others give ear and then delve into them to uncover their deepest goals and grasp their most profound realities.

This admonishes the listener that the similitude drawn by God between the idolaters taking up guardians besides Him and that of a spider taking a home which is the most fragile of homes is not merely a poetic image or a claim empty of substance. Rather, it rests upon a logical argument and verified reality, to which the next verse refers.

خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(29:44) ***Allah created the heavens and the earth with reason. There is indeed a sign in that for the faithful.***

When God says that He created the heavens and the earth "with reason" (*bi al-ḥaqq*), this negates any triviality from their creation, as God says: *We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them for play. We did not create them except with reason; but most of them do not know* (44:38–39).

Therefore the creation of the heavens and the earth is upon a fixed and unalterable order, and following a continuous, unchanging and irrevocable divine habit. In reality, creation and governance do not differ, nor can one be divorced from the other,[1] insofar as the creation and fashioning of everything is necessarily and inarguably His sole purview. There is nothing besides Him save that it is created by Him, subsisting through Him and His possession, possessing no benefit or harm for itself. Therefore it is impossible that such a thing should ever look after its own affairs or the affairs of any other being in a way that is independent of Him and not in need of Him with regard to its affair. This is the "reason" (*ḥaqq*) in which there is no play and the earnestness in which there is no joke.

So if one part of His creation looked after the affairs of another part,

1 This is because the locus of governance is the phenomena that permeate the cosmos and governance means for one phenomenon to follow from another in accordance with an orderly system that will fulfil their ultimate purpose. In reality governance means to create one phenomenon after another. Therefore it is the same as creation and origination insofar as bringing one thing into alignment with another like it and combining the two is nothing more than creation and origination. (Auth.)

that is not genuine guardianship because this part does not truly have any share in the meaning of "dominion" (*mulk*), rather this would be a kind of play on His part; if He delegated the matter of governance to a part of his creation, that would also be a kind of play on His part. And insofar as this is nothing more than a false supposition and an unreal fancy, this is the very essence of play (*laʿb*).

Therefore it is clear the guardianship of those whose guardianship they call upon is no more worthy of the name "guardianship" than a spider's web is worthy of the name "house."

There is indeed a sign in that for the faithful—specifically for the faithful, even though the verse is equally applicable to everyone, because the only ones who benefit from this sign are the faithful.

اتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ ۖ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ
الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(29:45) ***Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and maintain the prayer. Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs, and the remembrance of Allah is surely greater. And Allah knows whatever you do.***

Having made general mention of the stories of past nations and the eternal wretchedness and loss that befell of them as a result of their idolatry, indecency and wickedness, the discourse now turns to a new topic, namely enjoining the Prophet to recite what has been revealed to him of the book because this is the best deterrent against idolatry, indecency and evil. This is because of its clear verses which offer proofs to illuminate the truth, and contain stories, lessons, admonitions, glad-tidings and warnings, promises of reward and punishment, which will act as a deterrent to the reciter and those who hear him.

This is accompanied by a command to maintain the prayer, which is the best of deeds. The reason for this command is given in the verse, *Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs*. The tenor of the verses suggests that "prevent" (*nahī*) here means that the very nature of prayer restrains the one who offers it from indecency and wrongdoing, in the sense of hindering someone from performing them without preventing him completely.

It is the nature of such reverent concentration (*tawajjuh ʿibādī*) that,

when God's servant engages in it and repeats it five times a day, one day after another (and especially if he does this under the influence of a righteous society), this will restrain him from committing every kind of major sin that offends one's religious sensibility (*dhawq dīnī*), such as murder, embezzling the wealth of orphans, fornication, sodomy, and everything that a healthy conscience and upright human nature would reject. And this works on the level of both contemplation and action.

This is because, first of all, because prayer calls to mind belief in God's absolute oneness, in prophethood and the Hereafter; it instills in the person a sense that he is speaking directly to his Lord through the sincerity of worship, seeking His assistance and asking Him to guide him upon his straight path, while seeking refuge from His wrath and from misguidance.

Secondly, prayer urges him to direct his body and soul towards the awesome realm of divinity, to remember his Lord's praise and glory, to magnify and exalt Him, and finally to invoke God's peace upon himself, his companions and all righteous servants of God. This is in addition to its motivating him to cleanse himself of all filth and impurity in his person and clothing, and to ensure that neither his clothes nor the place in which he prays has been unjustly taken from another, before he turns towards the House of his Lord.

Therefore, when the human being persists for a while in offering prayers with sincerity, this creates a fixed habit (*malaka*) in his soul in the form of an aversion to all kinds of indecency and wrongdoing. And had you been left to you own devices, who could have nurtured your soul to be so righteous or to be adorned with the etiquettes of servant hood, without expecting or asking more of you than what mere prayer requires?

Regarding this verse, one could object that many of those who pray frequently pay no mind to committing major sins, nor do they seem averse to wrongdoing, so it appears as though their prayer has not prevented them from indecency or wrongdoing!

This is why some have suggested that "prayer" (*ṣalāt*) in this verse actually means supplication (*duʿāʾ*), which means calling (*daʿwa*) people to God's command. In other words: "Keep calling people to God's command, for that will prevent people from indecency and wrongdoing." However, the problem with this reading is that it completely disregards the apparent meaning of the verse.

Others still have said that "prayer" here is actually meant in an

indefinite sense, that is—that some kinds of prayer or some instances of prayer prevent people from indecency and wrongdoing, which is the case. But the meaning never meant to imply every kind of prayer in the first place in order for this objection to be valid.

Still others have said that "preventing" indecency and wrongdoing means so long as a person is engaged in his prayers, as if to say: "A person, so long as he is praying, is too busy to be engaged with disobeying God through acts of indecency and wrongdoing."

Some have said the verse does not need to be interpreted in a manner contrary to its apparent meaning, but "prayer" here functions like a person who forbids something by saying: "Do not do that." However, just because someone forbids something, this does not guarantee that no one will do it, and prayer forbidding something is no greater than God Himself forbidding it, as God says: *Indeed Allah enjoins justice and kindness and generosity towards relatives, and He forbids indecency, wrong, and aggression* (16:90) and, even when God forbids something, this does not guarantee that people will desist from it. Therefore this objection is based on the assumption that prohibition guarantees avoidance, which is utterly false.

Others have responded to this objection by saying that prayer functions as way of remembering God, as He says in the verse: *…and maintain the prayer for My remembrance* (20:14). Now, someone who is mindful of God will restrain himself from doing things which God dislikes. Therefore, if someone prays but is also engaged indecency and wrongdoing, this means he would have been even worse off if he had not prayed at all, as the effect of his prayer has been to reduce his indecency and wrongdoing.

However, it is plain to see that these answers are not fully compatible with the context of this ruling or the reason given for it in the verse. What the context suggests is that the reason given for maintaining the prayer—*the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs*—is only given to show that prayer is an act of worship whose performance nurtures a person's spirituality which in turn discourages him from indecency and wrongdoing. Therefore, by praying a person cleanses his soul of such impurities and frees it from sins and misdeeds.

Therefore this verse is referring to the formation of the habit (*malaka*) of restraint, which is an essential effect of prayer's nature, as opposed to an effect that only some kinds of prayer will have (as per the second answer, above); or an effect that lasts only so long as the prayer does (as per

the third); or merely a means for someone to "hear" prayer's prohibition without considering whether or not this is effective, as if to say, "maintain prayer to hear its prohibition" (as per the fourth); or that the meaning of the command is "maintain the prayer so that the remembrance it involves will forbid you from indecency and wrongdoing" (as per the fifth).

So the proper response to this objection is that deterrence is a natural effect of prayer, which is a specific ritual that directs a person towards God; this effect is consequential (*iqtiḍāʾī*) but not determined in the manner that a sufficient cause determines its effect. Therefore it is possible that it will not have its effect due to the presence of some impediments that weaken the effects of remembrance and distract the worshiper from it. Therefore, the stronger the act of remembrance, and the more complete a person's presence of mind and fear in his prayers, and the purer his dedication to God, the more potent the deterrent against indecency and wrongdoing, and the weaker these are, the weaker the deterrent.

If you take a moment to reflect on the condition of some of those who associate themselves with Islam while simultaneously abandoning their prayers you see that, because they forsake their prayers, they also forsake the duties of fasting, pilgrimage, almsgiving, *khums* and all other religious obligations; they do not distinguish between ritually pure and impure substances, nor permissible and forbidden things. Instead, they live their lives however they please. If you compare such a person with someone who observes even the minimum level of prayer necessary to fulfil his moral obligation, you will see he avoids many of the sins committed by one who abandons their prayers altogether and has more self-control. This is even if he does not pray a lot. Now, if you compare this with someone who takes his prayers more seriously, you will see that he—by the same token—is even more averse to sinning and in even greater control of himself.

…and the remembrance* (dhikr) *of Allah is surely greater: Al-Rāghib says in his *Mufradāt* that *dhikr* sometimes is used to mean the function of the soul that allows the human being to preserve whatever knowledge he acquires. In this sense it is similar to the word *ḥifẓ* (memory) save for the fact that *ḥifẓ* refers to the aspect of storing the information while *dhikr* refers to the aspect of recalling it. At other times, *dhikr* denotes the presence of something in the heart or in speech. This is why some say there are two kinds of *dhikr*, one from forgetfulness (*nisyān*) and the other from memory (*ḥifẓ*), and all kinds of speech are called *dhikr*.

It appears that the original sense of *dhikr* is the first one, and verbal expressions are only called *dhikr* because they incorporate the presence of that meaning in the heart, and the remembrance of the heart (*al-dhikr al-qalbī*) in relation to spoken remembrance (*al-dhikr al-lafẓī*) is like an effect that results from its cause or the goal for which an action was performed.

Prayer is called a *dhikr* because it incorporates spoken remembrance in the form of glorifying, extolling and praising God. From one angle, it is an instance of remembrance because it exemplifies a servant's servitude towards God as in the verse: *O you who have faith! When the call is made for prayer on Friday, hurry toward the remembrance of Allah…* (26:9). From another angle, this spoken worship brings about a state of remembrance and this remembrance is its goal, a fact God alludes to in the verse: *…and maintain the prayer for My remembrance* (20:14).

The remembrance which is the desired outcome of prayer (meaning remembrance of the heart in the sense of summoning the object of remembrance in the receptacle of thought, whether it was previously absent due to forgetfulness or continuously present) is the best act that can conceivably emanate from the human being; it is the highest in honor, the most magnificent in value and the most profound in its effect, for it is the eternal felicity that has been prepared for the human being and the key to all goodness.

Therefore, the apparent meaning we derive from the tone of the verse *Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs* is that the phrase *and the remembrance of Allah is surely greater* is connected to it and expounds still another effect of prayer that is actually even greater than the one that came before it. For this reason, *and the remembrance of Allah is surely greater* represents a semantic turn and ascent and signifies the remembrance of the heart which is the ultimate outcome desired of prayer. It is as if to say: "Maintain the prayer to restrain yourself from indecency and wrongdoing. No! Rather the awareness of God you will gain from prayer is greater than any dissuasion against indecency and wrongdoing because it is the greatest good attainable for the human being and the key to every good thing, whereas preventing indecency and wrongdoing is merely one good thing."

It is possible that "remembrance" here refers to the remembrance incorporated in the prayer or maybe the prayer itself. In this case, the

semantic turn remains intact but its meaning becomes: "No! Rather the remembrance of God contained in the prayer (or the prayer itself, which is also the remembrance of God) is even greater than this effect, namely preventing indecency and wrongdoing, because this prevention is only one beneficial effect of prayer."

In both cases, *and the remembrance of Allah* is the case of a verbal noun in a possessive construct with a noun signifying the object of its verb. And the object of the comparative noun *greater* is "than preventing indecency and wrongdoing."

Scholars hotly debate the exact meaning of *remembrance* in this verse, whether it is in a possessive construct with the subject or object of its verb, and whether the object of the comparative noun is general or specific.

For example, some of the meanings given for the verse are as follows:

(1) God's remembrance of His servant is greater than the servant's remembrance of God, and that is because God remembers those who remember Him, per the verse: *Remember Me, and I will remember you* (2:152).
(2) God's remembrance of His servant is greater than prayer.
(3) God's remembrance of His servant is greater than anything else.
(4) The servant's remembrance of God in his prayer is greater than all the other components of prayer.
(5) The servant's remembrance of God in prayer is greater than his remembrance of Him at other times.
(6) The servant's remembrance of God is greater than all of his other deeds.
(7) Prayer is greater than any other act of obedience.
(8) The servant's remembrance of God when he is about to commit an indecency or wrong and his remembrance of God's prohibition of such acts is a greater deterrent than prayer.
(9) The word *akbar* (greater) does not connote comparison, therefore it does not need an object. This is like the verse *What is with Allah is better than diversion* (62:11).

We have not dealt with the various opinions expressed by scholars on this verse out of concern for brevity. In most instances merely pondering on the verse is more than sufficient to dismiss these interpretations, especially since some of them are quite obviously arbitrary.

And Allah knows whatever you do—meaning He knows whatever good

or evil you commit, therefore you should be vigilant of your behavior, not negligent. Therefore, this sentence encourages the audience to be vigilant of themselves (*murāqaba*); this is especially relevant with respect to the first interpretation.

وَلَا تُجَادِلُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ ۖ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَإِلَٰهُنَا وَإِلَٰهُكُمْ وَاحِدٌ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(29:46) ***Do not dispute with the People of the Book except in a manner which is best, barring such of them as are wrongdoers, and say: We believe in that which has been sent down to us and has been sent down to you; our Allah and your Allah is one [and the same], and to Him do we submit.***

Insofar as God commands His servants to spread His message and preach to people by reciting the Qur'an to them in the previous verse *Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book…*, He follows this with an explanation of how to preach. First, He forbids disputation (*mujādala*) with the People of the Book, namely the Jews and the Christians, but also the Zoroastrians and Sabeans, except in the best manner of disputation.

Disputation is only good if it does not include coarse language, insults and ridicule. Good disputation means to speak politely and kindly, in a way that does not upset the other side, and to approach them in such a way that both sides are agreed that are only looking to determine the truth without prejudice or obstinacy. And a disputation combines polite speech and cooperation then it is doubly good—in other words, it is the best manner of disputation!

For this reason, when God forbids disputing with the People of the Book except in what ways are best, he excludes those who are wrongdoers. Based on the context, the meaning of wrongdoing (*ẓulm*) here means that the other side are such that there is no benefit to being friendly, polite or seeking to cooperate with them, rather they see his manners and friendliness as a sign of his lowliness and think it is a merely subterfuge to dupe them out of their own beliefs. In the case of these wrongdoers, there is no benefit to disputing with them in what ways are best.

It is also for this reason that He follows on by explaining how to

approach such people and sets the discussion on a foundation both sides agree upon, on whose basis they can cooperate in trying to uncover the truth. He says, *…and say: We believe in that which has been sent down to us and has been sent down to you; our Allah and your Allah is one [and the same], and to Him do we submit.* The meaning of this is self-evident.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ ۚ فَالَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۖ وَمِنْ هَٰؤُلَاءِ مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِهِ ۚ وَمَا يَجْحَدُ بِآيَاتِنَا إِلَّا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(29:47) ***Thus have We sent down the Book to you; and those to whom We have given the Book believe in it, and of these there are some who believe in it, and none contests Our signs except the faithless.***

Meaning: "We have sent down the Qur'an to you with this description, which is submission (*islām*) to God and believing in His scriptures and messengers."

Some say it means: "Just as we sent down scriptures to Moses and Jesus, we have also sent down a scripture to you, and it is the Qur'an."

When God says *and those to whom We have given the Book…*, the fact of this derives from the way in which the Book was revealed. In other words, the Qur'an was sent down regarding submission to God and believing in His scriptures and messengers. And, insofar as the People of the Book already believe in God, His scriptures and His messengers, they naturally believe in it too. *And of these*—meaning the polytheists who worship idols—*are some who believe in it*. *And none contests*—meaning none of the People of the Book or these polytheists deny it except the faithless, who are those that cover truth with falsehood.

It is also possible that *those to whom We have given the Book* refers to the Muslims and *these* refers to the People of the Book. However, this is unlikely. Equally unlikely is that the pronoun "it" in *who believe in it* actually refers to the Prophet.

Note also that the phrase *And of these are some who believe in it* gives a level of independence to the polytheists who believe in it.

وَمَا كُنْتَ تَتْلُو مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَلَا تَخُطُّهُ بِيَمِينِكَ ۖ إِذًا لَارْتَابَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(29:48) ***You did not use to recite any scripture before it, nor did you write it with your right hand, for then the impugners*** **[mubṭilūn]** ***would have been skeptical.***

"Recitation" (*tilāwah*) means to read aloud, whether from memory or from a written book. Based on the context, it appears that the latter is intended by the verse. *Mubṭilūn* is the plural of *mubṭil* which means someone who brings falsehood (*bāṭil*) in speech. It is also used for someone who calls the truth false (i.e. he claims it is not true). The second meaning is most appropriate of the two for the present verse, although the first one is also plausible.

It appears that the expression *You did not used to recite…* means to deny the habit, that is, "It was not your habit to read and write…" as is indicated elsewhere in the Qur'an: *…or I have dwelled among you for a lifetime before it* (10:16).

Alternatively, some have suggested that this phrase means to deny the capacity, that is, "You were not able to read and write before…" but the first reading is more appropriate to the context of the argument, as it is presented to affirm that the truthfulness of the Qur'an and its being sent down by God.

God specifies *your right hand* when He mentions writing for dramatic effect, as when someone says "I saw it with my own eyes!" or "I heard it with my own ears!"

Therefore, the verse means: "It was not your habit before the Qur'an was revealed to read other books nor was it your habit to write them." In other words: "You were not proficient in reading and writing because you were unschooled (*ummī*). Were this not the case then those impugners who denied the truth and called it false would have been sceptical. However, you neither read nor wrote all your life and they knew this of you because they lived alongside you all this time. Therefore there is no room for them to doubt that the Qur'an which has been revealed to you is indeed the word of God; it is not something you have pieced together from previous scriptures by borrowing from their stories and other parts, which would have meant that they could have justified their disbelief."

بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِي صُدُورِ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ ۚ وَمَا يَجْحَدُ بِآيَاتِنَا إِلَّا الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(29:49) ***Rather it is manifest signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge, and none contests Our signs except wrongdoers.***

This verse aims to preclude a possible implication of the previous verse. It is as though when God said that the Prophet neither read nor wrote this shows that the Qur'an is not a book that has been written and bound. God precludes this possibility by saying: *Rather it*—the Qur'an—*is manifest signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge…*

…and none contests Our signs except the wrongdoers: Based on the context, the kind of wrongdoing referenced in this verse means wronging God's signs by denying them and arrogantly rejecting them out of obstinacy and stubbornness.

وَقَالُوا لَوْلَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ ۖ قُلْ إِنَّمَا الْآيَاتُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَإِنَّمَا أَنَا نَذِيرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

(29:50) ***They say: If only some signs were sent down to him from his Lord? Say: The signs are only with Allah, and I am only a manifest warner.***

Above, God mentioned the Book and commanded the Prophet to recite it and invite people to Him using it. Then He mentioned that there are people who believe and others who do not, and that the latter are the wrongdoers and the faithless. In this verse and the two that follow it, God highlights their lack of interest in the Qur'an, which is the sign of prophethood, and portrays them instead impertinently demanding that the Prophet bring them other signs instead. These verses also contain God's response to them.

They say: If only some signs were sent down to him from his Lord? In this verse, they demand that he bring them signs other than the Qur'an, showing that they do not believe the Qur'an is a sign. Here, they are also claiming that the Prophet must have superhuman powers which allow him to do whatever he wants. The fact that they say *If only some sign were sent down to him…* rather than "If only he brought us some sign…" displays a kind of mocking attitude. This is like when they say: *They said: O you, to whom the Reminder has been sent down, you are indeed crazy. Why do you not bring us the angels, should you be truthful?!* (15:7)

Say: The signs are only with Allah, and I am only a manifest warner: This is in response to their assertion that anyone who claims to be a divine messenger is claiming to have some kind of occult powers which allow him to do whatever he wishes. Instead, the Prophet is instructed to say that the signs belong only to God and that He sends them down whenever and however He pleases; no one has any share in His power over them. Therefore, it is not for the Prophet to bring anything except that God wills it. This is made even clearer by the fact that the Prophet is described as *only a manifest warner.*

أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِهِمْ أَنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَرَحْمَةً وَذِكْرَىٰ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

(29:51) ***Does it not suffice them that We have sent down to you the Book which is recited to them? There is indeed a mercy and admonition in that for a people who have faith.***

This verse in its entirety paves the way for the response to their second assertion, namely that the Qur'an is not itself a sign. It is addressed to the Prophet and the rhetorical question is meant to suggest: "This scripture which we sent down to you should suffice them as a sign, for when they hear it recited to them they are well aware of its miraculous nature, full as it is of mercy and admonition for the believers."

قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ شَهِيدًا ۖ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِالْبَاطِلِ وَكَفَرُوا بِاللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(29:52) ***Say: Allah suffices as a witness between me and you. He knows whatever there is in the heavens and the earth. Those who put faith in falsehood and defy Allah—it is they who are the losers.***

This is the answer God gives His Prophet to their second assertion, namely that God is a witness to our disagreement—the question of prophethood—and He testifies to my prophethood with His word which He has sent down to me; He knows whatever is in the heavens and the earth without anything escaping his knowledge. So if He bears witness in my favor, this suffices as proof of my claims!

They cannot respond by saying it is not the word of God because

they have been repeatedly challenged throughout the Qur'an to produce something like it. From this, we can be sure that *Say: Allah suffices as a witness between me and you* is not an empty claim or rhetorical device but a clear and logical argument.

Those who put faith in falsehood and defy Allah—it is they who are the losers: It is only they who are the losers because they deny God by denying His scripture in which he testifies to Muḥammad's prophethood. And, because they deny God (who is the Truth), they have necessarily put their faith in falsehood. Therefore they are in a state of loss because of their faith.

وَيَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِالْعَذَابِ ۚ وَلَوْلَا أَجَلٌ مُسَمًّى لَجَاءَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَلَيَأْتِيَنَّهُمْ بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(29:53) ***They ask you to hasten the punishment. Yet were it not for a specified time, the punishment would have surely overtaken them. Surely it will overtake them suddenly while they are unaware.***

This alludes to what they had said (like those who had said it before them): "Bring us God's punishment, should you be truthful!" And God has already referenced their impertinence in the verse: *And if We defer their punishment until a certain time, they will surely say: What holds it back?* (11:8)

A specified time (ajal musammā) refers to that time which God decreed for Adam when he sent Adam down to the earth, saying: *on the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time* (2:36) and *There is a time for every nation: when their time comes, they shall not defer it by a single hour nor shall they advance it* (7:34).

As for the punishment which is being held back by this specified time, it is that punishment which they deserve for all of their evil deeds, as God says: *Your Lord is the All-forgiving dispenser of mercy. Were He to take them to task because of what they have committed, He would have surely hastened their punishment. But they have a tryst. They will not find a refuge besides Him* (18:58). This does not contradict God hastening His punishment by sending down the signs demanded from the Messenger and thereby removing any cause for reprise or delay, as God says: *Nothing keeps Us from sending signs except that the ancients denied them* (17:59).

يَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِالْعَذَابِ وَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ لَمُحِيطَةٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾ يَوْمَ يَغْشَاهُمُ
الْعَذَابُ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِهِمْ وَيَقُولُ ذُوقُوا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ﴿٥٥﴾

(29:54-55) ***They ask you to hasten the punishment, and indeed hell will besiege the faithless, on the day when the punishment envelops them, from above them and from under their feet, and He will say: Taste what you used to do!***

God repeats *They ask you to hasten the punishment* (yastaʿjilūnaka bi al-ʿadhāb) to show their utter ignorance and lack of understanding; firstly, because they are trying to hasten something which is ordained and cannot be rushed; secondly, because they are trying to hasten a punishment that cannot be averted from them, as they are only going to be punished because of their deeds which are inseparable from them.

When the verse says that the punishment *envelops them*, this means it surrounds them from all sides, and the phrase, *on the day when the punishment envelops them* is an adverbial construct signifying the time when *hell will besiege the faithless.*

Examining Narrations

(1) The Prophet recited the verse, *but no one grasps them except those who have knowledge* (29:43), and said: "One who has knowledge is he who reflects upon God and so acts to obey Him while avoiding His displeasure."[1]

(2) Concerning the verse, *Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs…* the Prophet said: A prayer that does not prevent a person from indecency and wrongdoing only increases his distance from God.[2]

(3) The Prophet said: There is no prayer for him that does not obey

1 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, on the authority of al-Wāḥidī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Jābir.

2 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, on the authority of Anas b. Mālik. This tradition is also narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from the Prophet, on the authority of ʿImrān b. al-Ḥuṣayn, Ibn Masʿūd, Ibn ʿAbbās, and Ibn ʿUmar. Al-Qummī has also reported it in his *Tafsīr* without naming the Imam and without a chain of narration.

his prayers, and obedience to one's prayers means to desist from indecency and wrongdoing.[1]

(4) Anas said: A young man of the Helpers would offer his prayers with God's Messenger and commit indecencies. This was described to the Prophet, who said: "Indeed his prayer will one day prevent him."[2]

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Whoever wishes to know whether or not his prayers have been accepted, let him see whether his prayers prevent him from committing indecencies and doing wrong. However much his prayers restrain him from such behaviors, this is the extent to which God has accepted them.[3]

(6) Concerning the verse, *and the remembrance of Allah is surely greater…* (29:45) Imam al-Bāqir said: God's remembrance of those people who pray is greater than their remembrance of Him. Do you not see that God says: *remember Me and I will remember you* (2:152)?[4]

Author's comment: This is one of the meanings which we have outlined above.

(7) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Remember God in the presence of what He has permitted and what He has forbidden.[5]

(8) Muʿādh b. Jabal says: I asked God's Messenger, "Which deed is most beloved to God?" He told me: "That you die while your tongue is moist with God's remembrance."[6]

(9) The Prophet also said: O Muʿādh! Verily the foremost (*sābiqūn*) are those who awake early for the remembrance of God. So let whoever wishes to revel in the gardens of paradise remember God abundantly![7]

(10) Concerning the verse, *Rather it is manifest signs in the breasts of*

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1 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*. This has also been narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd and others.

2 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*.

3 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, on the authority of "some of our companions."

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū Jārūd.

5 *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*, on the authority of *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, on the authority of "some of our companions."

6 *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*.

7 *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*.

those who have been given knowledge (29:49) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: They are the Imams.[1]

Author's comment: This is an example of *jary* (application), which means matching the verse with a clear application of it. The next narration shows this [that the verse's meaning is not limited to the Imams].

(11) Burayd b. Muʿāwiya says: Once I asked Imam al-Bāqir about the verse: *Rather it is manifest signs in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge*. He said: They are you [our followers]. Who else could they be!?[2]

(12) Some of the Companions of God's Messenger were writing parts of the Torah. When the Prophet was informed of this, he said: "Indeed the most foolish and misguided of people are those who prefer the revelation of another prophet to that of their own, who was sent to a nation other than them!" Then God sent down the verse: *Does it not suffice them that We have sent down to you the Book which is recited to them?* (29:51).[3]

(13) Once ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmir b. Kurayz sent a gift to ʿĀʾishah, but she thought he was ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar so she refused it. She said: "He studies the scriptures [of others] even though God has said: *Does it not suffice them that We have sent down to you the Book which is recited to them?*" Then someone told her: "It is ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿĀmir." So she accepted the gift.[4]

Author's comment: The apparent meaning of the last two narrations, especially the first, is that the verse was revealed about some of the Companions. However, the context and tone of the verses do not allow for this.

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-ʿAbdī. The same meaning is reported in *al-Kāfī* and *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt* via various chains of narration.

2 *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*, on the authority of *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*, via its chain of narration.

3 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ismāʿīlī's *al-Muʿjam* and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Yaḥyā b. Jaʿdah, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

4 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAsākir relates from Ibn Abī Mulaykah.

Verses 56-60

Having rebuked those believers who forsake their religion out of fear of persecution, God follows on by discussing the remaining believers whom the idolaters had oppressed in Mecca and whom they taunted with threats of persecution and torture. He instructs them to be steadfast and to put their trust in God, and to migrate from there if it is too difficult for them to hold on to their faith. He also admonishes them not to fear for their provision, for this is in God's hands; it is He who will provide for them if they set off to emigrate, just as it was only Him that provided for them when they remained.

يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ أَرْضِي وَاسِعَةٌ فَإِيَّايَ فَاعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾

(29:56) ***O My servants who have faith! My earth is indeed vast. So worship only Me.***

This verse is addressed to those believers who find themselves in the land of disbelief and cannot openly practice the true religion or follow its teachings. This is indicated by the latter part of the verse.

My earth is indeed vast: The context of the verse suggests that *earth* (arḍ) means the ground upon which we dwell; it is added to the pronoun *My* to show that the earth in its entirety is one and the same to God, in that He can be worshiped anywhere on it. Describing it as *vast* suggests that if someone is prevented from following the true religion in one region of it, there are other regions in which he can do so. This means that it is never impossible to worship God, no matter what conditions prevail.

***So worship only Me* (fa iyāya fa ʿbudūn):** The first *fāʾ* is to draw a conclusion from the vastness of the earth while the second *fāʾ* signifies the consequent of a conditional sentence (*jazāʾ li al-sharṭ*) that is implicit in the verse. In other words, "if that is the case, then worship only Me." It appears that *iyāya* is placed in front of the verb to signify exclusivity (that is, "only"). This renders the meaning: "Do not worship anyone except Me, but worship only Me!"

In short: "My earth is vast. If you cannot worship Me in one region of it, then you can worship Me in another. Therefore, worship Me alone and

do not worship anyone except Me. If you cannot worship Me in one part of the earth, then migrate to another and worship Me there."

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ۖ ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(29:57) ***Every soul shall taste death. Then you shall be brought back to Us.***

This verse places emphasis on the command *So worship only Me* and is a preliminary to the forthcoming verse *Those who are patient and who put their trust in their Lord…* (29:59).

Every soul shall taste death: It is a metaphorical way of saying that every soul will eventually die. The shift to directly addressing the listener when God says *Then you shall be brought back to Us* is to inspire awe.

So the meaning of this verse is: "The life of this world is just a handful of days followed by death. Then you will return to Us to be held to account. So do not let the trinkets of this worldly life—which are nothing more than fleeting vanities—distract you from preparing to meet God by having faith and doing righteous deeds. It is this that contains your everlasting happiness, and the neglect of this that will bring about your never ending ruin."

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُبَوِّئَنَّهُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ غُرَفًا تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۚ نِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(29:58) ***Those who have faith and do righteous deeds, We will surely settle them in lofty abodes*** **(ghurafa)** ***of paradise with streams running in them, to remain in them forever. How excellent is the reward of the workers!***

Here, God expounds the reward that awaits a person's faith and righteous deeds after they die and return to Him. This verse encourages the faithful and motivates them to endure hardship for God's sake and rely upon Him. "To settle" means to set someone down to reside somewhere; *ghuraf* is the plural of *ghurfa*, which is a room in the upper floor of a house.

First, God describes the reward of those who believe and do righteous deeds. Then he calls them "workers" (*ʿāmilīn*) by saying: *How excellent is the reward of the workers!* before explaining what he means by this in the

next verse: *Those who are patient and who put their trust in their Lord…* (29:59). In this way, He makes patience (*ṣabr*) and trusting in God (*tawakkul*) special qualities of the faithful. This shows that a believer's faith is only accepted when he endures hardship for God's sake and places his trust in Him. Therefore the believer must endure, in the way of God, every difficulty and pain that he encounters in his worldly life. And if it becomes impossible for him to follow the teachings of his religion in his land, then he must leave it and travel somewhere else, enduring suffering and privation for the sake of God.

الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(29:59) ***Those who are patient and who put their trust in their Lord.***

This is a description of *the workers*. Patience (*ṣabr*) here includes both enduring hardships, performing obligations and avoiding sins, although the particular context here is related to enduring hardships as it best relates to the condition of the faithful in Mecca who are being told to emigrate.

وَكَأَيِّنْ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ لَا تَحْمِلُ رِزْقَهَا اللَّهُ يَرْزُقُهَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ ۚ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٦٠﴾

(29:60) ***How many an animal there is that does not carry its own provision. Allah provides for it, and for you, and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.***

How many (ka ayyin) suggests abundance. To *carry… provision* means to store it up as is the habit of human beings, ants, bees, mice and some other creatures.

This verse is supposed to reassure the faithful and strengthen their hearts by telling them that if they emigrate for the sake of God, He will give them their provision no matter where they are. They will not die of hunger, for their provider is their Lord and not their homeland. Here, God says: "There are many animals that do not carry their provision around with them, but God still provides for them. And He also provides for you, O humans who store up your food! *And He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.*"

By concluding the verse with these two names, God is alluding to the

proof of what has just been said, namely that the human being and all other creatures are in need of God for their provision and entreat Him for this provision by virtue of their existential neediness. And God is the one who hears His creatures' prayers and knows all their needs. Therefore it is only logical, based on these names, that He will provide for them!

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Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning the verse, *O My servants who have faith! My earth is indeed vast…* (29:56) Imam al-Bāqir said: He [God] is saying "Do not obey sinful rulers. And if you fear that they will persecute you and prevent you from practising your faith, then my earth is indeed vast." And elsewhere He says: *Indeed, those whom the angels take away while they are wronging themselves, they ask: What state were you in? They reply: We were abased in the land. They say: Was not Allah's earth vast enough so that you might migrate in it?* (4:97).[1]

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It means if God is disobeyed in the land where you live, then move to a different land.[2]

(3) God's Messenger said: "When the verse *You will indeed die, and they too will die indeed* (39:30) was revealed, I said: "O my Lord! Will all creatures die and the prophets survive?" Then the verse was revealed: *Every soul shall taste death* (29:57).[3]

Author's comment: However, there are some problems with its content. After all, when God says *You will indeed die, and they too will die indeed*, this informs the Prophet of his own death and the death of all people, and he knows that those prophets who came before him had died. Therefore it makes no sense for him to ask: "Will all creatures die and the prophets survive?"

(4) Ibn ʿUmar said: We went out with God's Messenger until we entered some walled orchards belonging to the Helpers. He began to pick up dates and eat them and said to me: "O Ibn ʿUmar! Why

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū Jārūd.

2 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*.

3 *Al-ʿUyūn*, via its chain of narration, from Imam al-Riḍā. The same tradition is narrated from [Imam] ʿAlī in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

don't you eat?" I said: "I don't feel like it, O Messenger of God!" He said: "I do! This is the fourth morning on which I haven't tasted food. If I wanted to, I could ask my Lord to give me a kingdom like that of Khosrow or Caesar! So how would it be for you, O Ibn ʿUmar, if you lived with a people who stored up provision of an entire year because they lacked certainty?" By God, not a moment had passed before the verse was revealed: *How many an animal there is that does not carry its own provision. Allah provides for it, and for you, and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing* (29:60).[1]

Author's comment: This tradition has also been narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*. However, it has a weak chain of narration and, additionally, its contents do not match the context of the verse as we outlined above.

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1 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, on the authority of ʿAtāʾ.

Verses 61-69

These verses shift from addressing the faithful to addressing just the Prophet but their content is intended for everyone, even if their grammatical form only speaks to Him, because the proofs they contain are applicable to all.

The verses in this section discuss the contradictory opinions held by the idolaters about what the faithful were presented and believed in above; they acknowledge that the creator of the heavens and the earth and the director of the sun and the moon—upon which people's sustenance depends—is none other than God, and that it is He who sends down rain from the heavens and gives life to the barren land but they still call on other deities to give them sustenance; they worship God when they travel by sea, but when they reach land they worship others; they live in a holy sanctuary which is His blessing to them but they believe in falsehood, deny the truth and scorn his blessings.

The concluding verse of this sūrah, *As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways, and Allah is indeed with the virtuous* (29:69), matches the opening of the sūrah, *Do the people suppose that they will be let off because they say: We have faith, and they will not be tested… Whoever strives, strives only for his own sake* (29:2–6).

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ ۖ فَأَنَّىٰ يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(29:61) ***If you ask them: Who created the heavens and the earth, and disposed the sun and the moon? They will surely say: Allah. Then where do they stray?***

The creation of the heavens and the earth, and the origination and disposal of the sun and the moon—by causing them to rise and set and alter in distance from the earth—are things which the sustenance of human beings and all other animals depends upon. Moreover, these two roles of creation and disposal (*al-khalq wa al-tadbīr*) are inseparable from one another. So, whoever acknowledges one of them must also acknowledge the other.

Insofar as God is the Creator, in whose hand is the governance of the heavens, the earth and the sustenance of all the creatures therein, it is He and no other who should be asked for provision and any other form of disposal. So it is strange indeed that the human being should turn to anyone besides Him, especially someone who has no power. This is why God says: *Then where do they stray?* In other words, when the creation and governance of the cosmos are in His hands, how can they invoke and worship idols besides Him?

اللَّهُ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

(29:62) ***Allah expands the provision for whomever He wishes of His servants, and measures it for him. Indeed Allah has knowledge of all things.***

This verse makes explicit what was hinted at in the previous one. "To measure" provision means to narrow or limit it, which is the opposite of "to expand," meaning to increase it. *Allah* is used instead of a pronoun in the verse's coda—*Indeed Allah has knowledge of all things*—to indicate why He has knowledge of all things; namely, because He is God!

In other words, God increases the provision of whoever He wishes and constrains the provision of whoever He wishes. However, God only wills something on the basis of His creatures' best interests (*maṣlaḥa*), which He knows because He has knowledge of all things. And He has knowledge of all things because He is God, and God is absolutely perfect from every aspect.

وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ نَزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِهَا لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ ۚ قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

(29:63) ***And if you ask them: Who sends down water from the sky, with which He revives the earth after its death? They will surely say: Allah. Say: All praise belongs to Allah! But most of them do not apply reason.***

Revives the earth after its death means to cause vegetation to flourish in the season of Spring.

Say: All praise belongs to Allah! means: "I praise God for completing the argument against them through their own admission that He alone governs the affairs of His creation; therefore they should worship only Him and not the idols or the deities they claim they represent!"

But most of them do not apply reason means: they do not reflect on the signs or make proper use of their intellects in order to know God, or to distinguish truth from falsehood. Therefore they do not really apply reason.

وَمَا هَٰذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ ۚ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ ۚ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

(29:64) ***The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known!***

Diversion (*lahw*) is whatever distracts you from something of importance, so the life of this world is a kind of diversion because its fleeting vanities distract the human being from the eternal life of the Hereafter.

Play (laʿb) is a kind of organized activity that is devoid of purpose, like the games children play. The life of this world is a kind of play because it is ephemeral and will soon pass into oblivion, just as children gather together and devote themselves to a game for a while but then lose interest and move on to something else. Now, most of the objectives for which people compete and towards which the wrongdoers hasten are illusory and counterfeit; take, for example their wealth, spouses, children, and various kinds of social standing, leadership and power—if they possess these things, many of them exist only in the confines of their own minds and imaginations, so they do not actually possess anything at all!

On the other hand, the life of the Hereafter, in which the human being will dwell in the actual perfection he has acquired by virtue of his faith and righteous deeds, is a goal in whose pursuit there is no diversion, play, futility or blame; it is life without end; pleasure without pain; happiness unsullied by grief. Therefore it is life in the truest sense of the word.

This is what God means when He says: *The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter—it is indeed Life…*

As you can see, this verse reduces all worldly life to diversion and play. It uses the demonstrative pronoun *this* to imply lowliness. Meanwhile, the

life of the Hereafter is nothing but life, and it is actually life itself.[1]

…*had they known!*—meaning that if they knew, they would have known the reality to be as We have described it.

فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلْكِ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ فَلَمَّا نَجَّاهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

(29:65) ***When they board the ship, they invoke Allah putting exclusive faith in Him, but when He delivers them to land, behold, they ascribe partners.***

This draws a conclusion from what the above verses have said about their condition; that they stray and many do not apply reason. In other words, they go astray by turn aside from worshiping God to worshiping others and most of them to not apply reason because they contradict themselves by acknowledging one thing but denying the same thing's consequences.

When they board the ship…: "To board something" (*rukūb*) means to sit atop something that moves; the verb is transitive in itself but it is given a preposition in the verse to convey a sense akin to permanence. In other words: "When they board the ship and remain upon it, or remain riding upon the ship…" The rest of the meaning is obvious and it demonstrates yet another example of them contradicting themselves and denying God's blessings.

لِيَكْفُرُوا بِمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ وَلِيَتَمَتَّعُوا ۖ فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

(29:66) ***Let them be ungrateful*** **(li yakfurū)** ***for what We have given them! And let them enjoy*** **(li yatamattaʿū).** ***Soon they will know!***

The *lām* in *li yakfurū* and *li yatamattaʿū* is an imperative *lām*. Now, when God commands someone to do something He is displeased with, this signifies a threat and a warning. This is like when you say to someone: "Do what you like", as for example in the verse: *Act as you wish; indeed He sees best what you do* (41:40).

It is also possible that this is a purposive *lām*, in which case it means:

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1 This is shown by the use of emphasis in the form of *indeed* (inna), the *lām* of emphasis, and inserting the pronoun *it* of separation (*ḍamīr al-faṣl*). (Auth.)

"They do this in order to be ungrateful for Our blessings and to enjoy…" However, it is the first of these two possibilities that best accords with the verse's coda: *Soon they will know!* This is further supported by what God says elsewhere: *Let them be ungrateful toward what We have given them. So enjoy yourselves! Soon you will know!* (30:34) That is why some recite the *lām* without a vowel, as only the imperative *lām* can be vowel less.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا جَعَلْنَا حَرَمًا آمِنًا وَيُتَخَطَّفُ النَّاسُ مِنْ حَوْلِهِمْ ۚ أَفَبِالْبَاطِلِ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَبِنِعْمَةِ اللَّهِ يَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

(29:67) ***Have they not seen that We have appointed a safe sanctuary, while the people are despoiled all around them? Would they then believe in falsehood and be ungrateful toward the blessing of Allah?***

The *safe sanctuary* is Mecca and its environs. God made it a sanctuary in response to the prayer of Abraham and *despoiled* (*takhaṭṭaf*) means to violently wrest something away from someone. In those days the Arabs lived in a state of perpetual conflict and mutual depredation; they were constantly fighting, looting and enslaving one another. Yet, in spite of this, they respected the sanctity of the holy sanctuary at Mecca and did not aggress against anyone who dwelled therein.

Therefore this verse means: "Do they not consider the fact that we have made a safe sanctuary in which people are safe from killing, looting and enslavement, while everyone around this sanctuary are subject to such depredations?"

Would they then believe in falsehood and be ungrateful toward the blessing of Allah? God rebukes them for repaying this great blessing with ingratitude while believing in idols which are nothing but mere names.

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِالْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُ ۚ أَلَيْسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِلْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

(29:68) ***Who is a greater wrongdoer than him who fabricates a lie against Allah, or denies the truth when it comes to him? Is not the abode of the faithless in hell?***

God threatens them with the punishment of hell insofar as they are

imputed with the most serious kind of wrongdoing; inventing lies in God by claiming that He has taken other deities as partners with Himself, and denying the truth when it came to them. Both of these descriptions apply to the Meccan idolaters, for they worshiped idols and denied the Qur'an when it came to them. Therefore they are truly disbelievers and the place of such people in the Hereafter is hell.

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾

(29:69) ***As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways, and Allah is indeed with the virtuous.***

The root of "strive" (*mujāhahda*) is *j-h-d*, meaning to expend effort, while *mujāhada* literally means to give one's all in repelling an enemy. Striving has three varieties; striving against a manifest foe, striving against Satan, and striving against one's self. This is what has been mentioned by al-Rāghib.

…*strive in Us* means that "their struggle rests in Us." This is a figurative way of saying that their efforts are expended in things connected to God, whether beliefs or actions. In other words, nothing will turn them aside from believing in Him, following His commands and observing His prohibitions.

We shall surely guide them in Our ways…: God affirms the existence of ways (*subul*) for Himself and whatever these may be, they all lead to Him, as a way (*sabīl*) is nothing other than a means of reaching that to which it belongs, meaning its destination. Therefore, God's ways are those which bring people closer to Him and guide them towards Him. And insofar as the act of striving is itself a form of guidance, this means that guidance to God's ways is a kind of guidance upon guidance, as God alludes to in the verse: *As for those who are guided, He enhances their guidance* (47:17).

Based on the above, we can see that there is no need to interpret *in Us* as belonging to an implicit possessive construct to the effect of *for Our sake*.

…and Allah is indeed with the virtuous: Some have said God's being *with* them means in the sense of His assistance and support and this is supported by the fact this phrase appears alongside mention of striving. This is a plausible reading. However, a superior interpretation is that God's

being *with* them is symbolic of His mercy and concern for them, which would implicitly include His assistance and support, as well as many other forms of divine concern which He shows to His virtuous servants out of His infinite mercy and kindness. However, this being *with* is still more particular than the general sense of being with them by mere virtue of their existence (*wujūd*), which is the import of the verse: *…and He is with you wherever you may be…* (57:4).

And we have already mentioned above the appositeness of the conclusion of this sūrah to its opening.

Examining Narrations

(1) God's Messenger said: How strange it is to see one meant for the abode of life striving for the abode of deceit![1]

(2) The people told the Prophet: O Muḥammad! Naught prevents us entering your religion save the fear that people will despoil us and the Arabs are more numerous than we—when they hear we have entered your religion, they will feast upon us!
Then Allah revealed: *Have they not seen that We have appointed a safe sanctuary, while the people are despoiled all around them? Would they then believe in falsehood and be ungrateful toward the blessing of Allah?* (29:67).[2]

(3) Concerning the verse, *As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely guide them in Our ways, and Allah is indeed with the virtuous*, Imam al-Bāqir said: This verse is about the Household of Muḥammad and their followers.[3]

❧

End of Chapter 29

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1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Dunyā and al-Bayhaqī's *Shuʿab al-Īmān*, on the authority of Abū Jaʿfar.

2 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Juwaybir, on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū Jārūd.

Chapter 30

al-Rūm (The Romans)

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Verses 1–19

This sūrah begins with a promise from God that the Romans will defeat the Persians a few years after their rout at the latter's hands during the days when this sūrah was revealed. From here, it shifts to discuss the greatest promise of all, which is the promise of a day on which everyone will return to God. It provides proof of the Resurrection, accompanying this with those signs of God's lordship and Divine Attributes specific to this event. Finally, God concludes the sūrah by promising divine assistance to His Prophet, emphasizing this with a powerful statement: *So be patient! Allah's promise is indeed true. And do not let yourself be upset by those who have no conviction* (30:60). By which point something similar to this has already been said: *…and it was a must for Us to help the faithful* (30:47).

The ultimate goal of this sūrah, then, is to convey God's certain promise that He will grant His religion victory. He precedes this with a promise to grant victory to the Romans over the Persians several years after the time of this sūrah's revelation to show that just as He fulfils this promise, so too will He fulfil that one. Equally, He uses it to demonstrate alongside rational arguments that He will fulfil His promise regarding the Day of Reckoning in which there is no doubt.

الٓمٓ ﴿١﴾ غُلِبَتِ الرُّومُ ﴿٢﴾ فِيٓ أَدۡنَى الۡأَرۡضِ وَهُمۡ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ غَلَبِهِمۡ سَيَغۡلِبُونَ ﴿٣﴾
فِي بِضۡعِ سِنِينَۗ لِلَّهِ الۡأَمۡرُ مِن قَبۡلُ وَمِنۢ بَعۡدُۚ وَيَوۡمَئِذٖ يَفۡرَحُ الۡمُؤۡمِنُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(30:1–4) ***Alif, Lām, Mīm. The Romans have been vanquished in a nearby territory, but following their defeat they will be victors in a few years. All command belongs to Allah, before and after, and on that day the faithful will rejoice.***

The Romans were a race of people who lived on the coast of the Mediterranean in the West and possessed a vast empire that extended into the Levant. They faced intermittent warfare against the Persians in parts

of the Levant that were close to Hejaz. In one such conflict the Persians were victorious and the Romans withdrew. It appears as though *territory* here refers to the Hejaz.[1]

…but following their defeat* (min baʿd ghalabihim)*, they will be victors in a few years: The first and third plural pronoun "they" refers to the Romans. As for the second, some have suggested it refers to the Persians, in which case the meaning would be "But the Romans, following the Persian's victory, will be victors." However, it is possible that the verbal noun *ghalab* could be used to signify the object (*mafʿūl*), in which case the second pronoun "they" would also refers to the Romans [which is the reading reflected in the above translation]. This would render the meaning: "The Romans, following their defeat, will be victors." A "few" (*bidʿ*) of a number means between three and nine.

…All command belongs to Allah, before and after and on that day the faithful will rejoice: In the Arabic, both "before" (*qabl*) and "after" (*baʿd*) take a *ḍamma* as their final vowel because there is an implicit possessive construct, namely: "All command belongs to God, both before the Romans were defeated and afterwards. He commands whatever He wills, grants victory to whomever He wills and casts down whomever He wills."

Some have said that the meaning is: "All command belongs to God, both before they are victors, which is when they were defeated, and after they are defeated, which is when they become victors." In other words, at both times, all command is God's. The first reading is preferable, even if it has not always been preferred by the majority of commentators.

… and on that day the faithful will rejoice: *On that day* is semantically connected to *rejoice,* as is *He helps…* The meaning is: "On the day when the Romans are victorious, the faithful will rejoice at God's helping the Romans."

بِنَصْرِ اللَّهِ ۚ يَنْصُرُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ ۝٥

(30:5) ***At Allah's help. He helps whomever He wishes, and He is the All-mighty, the All-merciful.***

God then starts afresh, saying, *He helps whomever He wishes…* in line

1 The definite article *al-* in *al-Rūm* ("the" in *the Romans*) indicates that the subject of the verse is already known to the audience.

with what He said in the previous verse: *All command belongs to Allah, before and after*.

…and He is the All-mighty, the All-merciful: He is the All-mighty and He makes mighty whomever He wishes through His help (*naṣr*); He is the All-merciful and He singles out whomever He wishes for His mercy.

There are other weaker interpretations of this verse. For example that *…on that day* is connected to *…before* [that is, "before, after and on that day"] in order to encompass all three tenses—past, future and present, as if to say: "All command belongs to God, before, after and on that day." Then a new sentence begins: "The faithful will rejoice at God's help." The problem with this reading is that it breaks up the verse by separating the latter part from the first one.

Another interpretation is that *at Allah's help* is connected to *the faithful* but not to *rejoice*, meaning by extension that the victory of the Romans is only due to God's help. However, the problem with this is that it implies that the faithful should rejoice both on the day that the Persians were victorious and the day when the Romans were victorious, as all victories come only from God, as per the verse: *and victory comes only from Allah, the All-mighty, the All-wise* (3:126). Therefore, in such a reading, saying that the faithful will rejoice at God's help on the day the Romans are victorious becomes purely arbitrary!

Still another interpretation is that *Allah's help* refers to His help of the faithful against the idolaters at the Battle of Badr rather than His helping the Romans against the Persians, even though the two victories happened at the same time. It is as if to say: "The Romans will be victors in a few years and on the day they triumph the faithful will triumph over the idolaters and rejoice at God's help." However, this reading of the verse does not accord with the phrase *He helps whomever He wishes*.

Another interpretation is that God's help refers to His helping the faithful through bringing about the fulfilment of His prophecy that the Romans would be victorious.

Some say God's help means giving some disbelievers ascendancy over others, spreading dissent amongst them and breaking their power.

These latter two readings and others like them are not worthy of consideration.

وَعْدَ اللَّهِ ۖ لَا يُخْلِفُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦﴾

(30:6) ***Allah's promise. Allah does not break His promise, but most people do not know.***

Allah's promise is an absolute object for an implicit verb, meaning: "God has promised a promise." To break a promise means not to fulfil it.

When God says *Allah's promise*, this is an affirmation and emphasis of the promise He has given above in the verses *they will be victors* (30:3) and *the faithful will rejoice* (30:4). Equally, *Allah does not break His promise* is a further affirmation and emphasis of the phrase *Allah's promise*.

Allah does not break His promise (lā yukhlifu allāh waʿdah) has the same meaning as the verse *Indeed Allah does not break His promise* (13:31—*inna allāh lā yukhlifu al-mīʿād*). Even though it is not always morally wrong to break a promise—it could even be the right thing to do in an emergency—God does not face emergencies, therefore it is never right for Him to break a promise. Moreover, breaking a promise always implies deficiency and God has no deficiencies. Finally, even putting these aside, when God says that He does not break His promises and He is the most truthful of speakers—as per the verse *I speak the truth* (38:84)—it is impossible that He will break His promise.

But most people do not know means that they are ignorant of God's nature and do not trust His promises because they think He will behave as they do; sometimes speaking truly and others falsely, sometimes keeping promises and others breaking them.

يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَافِلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

(30:7) ***They know just an outward aspect of the life of the world, but they are oblivious of the Hereafter.***

According to Zamakasharī writing in *al-Kashshāf*, the sentence beginning *They know…* is a permutation of the sentence *do not know* in the previous verse; the reason for this is to show the audience that there is no difference between a lack of knowledge, which is ignorance, and having knowledge that does not exceed the bounds of this world.

It is said: This sentence is an exceptional clause (*istithnāʾ*) to illustrate the reason for their not knowing that God's promise is true, that all command belongs to God before and after and that He will help the faithful against the faithless.

The latter of the two is closer to the apparent meaning of the text.

An outward aspect is left indefinite (*nakira*) to illustrate its meagerness. *An outward aspect* (ẓāhir, from ẓuhūr) *of the life of this world* is the opposite of the inward aspect (*bāṭin*) and it is whatever vanities they perceive through their outer senses. This leads them to covet and pursue such vanities in a bid to acquire them, spending their whole life in this manner, forgetting that beyond this world lies another life and the [types of] knowledge connected with this life. Thus they remain unaware of what is genuinely best for them and what will benefit them in the truest sense of the word.

It is said: *Ẓuhūr* (appearances, outwardness) in this verse means *zawāl* (disappearance, fading, vanishing), as in the verses of poetry:

وعيرها الواشون أنى أحبها وتلك شكاة ظاهر عنك عارها

Because of my love for her, she's blamed in their view;
But the stains of this blame fall off from you (*ẓāhir ʿanka*).[1]

In which case the verse means: "What they know is only something fleeting and impermanent." However, this is based on a very uncommon usage of the word *ẓāhir*.

أَوَلَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ ۗ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا
إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَأَجَلٍ مُسَمًّى ۗ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِنَ النَّاسِ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ لَكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨﴾

(30:8) ***Have they not reflected in their own souls? Allah did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except in truth and for a specified term. Indeed many of the people disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord.***

When God says He created the heavens, the earth and whatever is between them—which refers to the entire visible world—*in truth* (bi al-ḥaqq), He means that He did not create them idly or without any

1 In other words, its stains vanish and fall off from you. It should be noted that in this poem, the sense of disappearance is not conveyed by the root *ẓ-h-r*, but by the preposition *ʿan* (from, across, over). The masculine "you" is apparently an impersonal generic pronoun. The poem is by Abū Dhuʾayb al-Hudhalī (d. 27 AH, 648 CE), translated by T. Raja. (Ed.)

purpose beyond the fact of their existing then ceasing to exist, then existing, then ceasing to exist. Rather, God says He created them with a purpose which will be realized through their existence.

Now, the world and all of its constituent parts do not exist eternally or without end, such that each part could be the purpose of the part that came before it, or each new part could have been created for a previous one. Instead, for the world and all of its components, even if they are transitory, there is a goal which God intended to bring about through their creation that will only become apparent once the world has passed away. That is why God limits His expression *Allah did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them* with the phrase *and for a specified term* after limiting them with *except in truth.*

The question *Have they not reflected in their own souls?* expresses amazement. *In their own souls* is a figure of speech meaning "with a clear and focused mind." It is as though their occupation with this world, all their efforts to live in it and the confusion in their minds causes them to lose their own sense of self. Thus, when they are paying attention it is as though they are present in themselves and, as a result, their thinking is focused rather than scattered and confused, and this kind of thinking will guide them to the truth and lead them to reality.

It is said: *reflected in their own souls* means to reflect upon the creation of their own souls and notice that each of them is originated (*muḥdath*), and to realize that whatever is originated needs an originator (*muḥdith*). Then, this originator must be eternal, all-living, all-powerful, all-knowing and all-wise and therefore does not create things idly but rather creates them for some purpose He intends. This purpose cannot be for His own sake because He is absolutely without need. Therefore the purpose must be for the sake of His creation; this purpose is divine reward (*thawāb*) and reward can only be attained through righteous deeds. Therefore there must be a religion promulgated to distinguish righteous deeds from wicked ones and, furthermore, there must be a place in which people are tested (this world) and another place where they are rewarded (the Hereafter).

However, the problem with such an interpretation is that while the sentence *have they not reflected in their own souls?* could itself be used for such a meaning, this would mean that the sentence *Allah did not create the heavens…* cannot follow it because this would mean there was no relationship between the beginning of the verse and its end.

Allah did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except in truth and for a specified term: This is the kind of reflection they must engage in within their own souls; based on the above, this line of thinking goes that God did not create this world, in all or part, except that it was accompanied by truth, namely that there was some real purpose behind its existence. It was not created idly and without purpose, nor until a specific time so that nothing would remain of it for all eternity. Yes, this world will fade away. But God created this world and all of its parts with a purpose in mind, and it is this purpose that will endure long after it has passed into nothingness. This purpose is the Hereafter, which will only become manifest after this world has come to an end.

Indeed many of the people disbelieve in the encounter with their Lord: This verse ends, as it began, with an expression of amazement. To encounter God means to return to Him at the Resurrection. This is called an "encounter" (*liqāʾ*) is to emphasize how amazing it is that they disbelieve in this—how can they begin with Him and not return to Him? That is why this sentence begins with *indeed* for emphasis, to show that disbelief in the Resurrection is something that is itself unbelievable!

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ كَانُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَأَثَارُوا الْأَرْضَ وَعَمَرُوهَا أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا عَمَرُوهَا وَجَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ۖ فَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَٰكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٩﴾

(30:9) ***Have they not travelled in the land so that they may observe how was the fate of those who were before them? They were more powerful than them, and they ploughed the earth and developed it more than they have developed it. Their messengers brought them manifest proofs. So it was not Allah who wronged them, but it was they who used to wrong themselves.***

Having said that, many people disbelieve in the Resurrection, which is something that defeats the very purpose of believing in the true religion, God reminds them of the condition of previous nations and the terrible punishments that befell them. This is done in the hope that the listeners will take a lesson from this and desist from their disbelief.

To "plough the earth" means to turn it over for the purposes of agriculture, construction or the like thereof.

…but it was they who used to wrong themselves means they wronged themselves by disbelieving and sinning.

ثُمَّ كَانَ عَاقِبَةَ الَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا السُّوأَىٰ أَنْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(30:10) *Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds was misfortune. That they denied the signs of Allah and they used to deride them.*

This verse explains what became of those wrongdoers, which is why it begins with "then" (*thumma*). Misfortune (*sawʾā*) means a deficiency that harms the one it befalls. In this case, it refers to divine punishment. *That they denied the signs of Allah* means "Because *they denied the signs of Allah*" (the *lām* of causation is implicit in the Arabic).[1]

As a whole, the verse means: "Then the fate of those who did evil was the worst punishment. They had no fate besides this, for they had denied God's signs and denied them."

It is said that the verse could also be rendered "Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds was that they denied the signs of God and they used to deride them." This would mean that their misdeeds had driven them to disbelief by denying God's signs and deriding them.

However, although this meaning is in itself plausible, the first meaning is more apposite to the context in which it appears. This is because the context here is one of warning them and teaching them a moral lesson and the first meaning does this by explaining that the outcome of their misdeeds will be divine punishment, while the second says that their various misdeeds will lead them to the even worse sins of denying God's signs and deriding them. Therefore, the first is more effective.

اللَّهُ يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿١١﴾

1 Fate (*ʿāqiba*) is in the accusative because it is the predicate of *kāna*. The subject of *kānā* is *misdeeds*. The predicate is placed first here to signify exclusivity (*ḥaṣr*) [that is, "the fate of those who committed misdeeds was *only*…"]. (Auth.)

(30:11) ***Allah originates the creation, then He will bring it back, then you will be brought back to Him.***

Having outlined the arguments at length above and described how many people deny His signs, God draws a very succinct conclusion, namely that the beginning and the end are in His hand and that everything will be brought back to Him. Here, creation (*khalq*) means "creatures" (*makhlūqūn*), and that is why He uses the plural pronoun in the coda.

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُبْلِسُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(30:12) ***And when the Hour sets in, the guilty will despair.***

Here, God describes the condition of the guilty sinners when the Hour sets in. This is, of course, the hour of their return to Him to be held to account and recompensed. The word despair (*yublis*) used in this verse means to despair of God's mercy and its meaning encompasses every kind of misery.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ مِنْ شُرَكَائِهِمْ شُفَعَاءُ وَكَانُوا بِشُرَكَائِهِمْ كَافِرِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

(30:13) ***None of those whom they ascribed as partners will intercede for them, and they were disbelievers through their partners.***

This means that as well as despairing of God's mercy for their own deeds, they will also lose all hope in their gods whom they had taken as partners to God and worshiped them in order to win their intercession with Him. They used to say in this world: "These gods are our intercessors with God!" And they were disbelievers, veiled from God by their worship of these partners.

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَفَرَّقُونَ ﴿١٤﴾ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَهُمْ فِي رَوْضَةٍ يُحْبَرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَلِقَاءِ الْآخِرَةِ فَأُولَئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(30:14–16) ***The day the Hour sets in, they will be divided on that day: As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, they shall be in a garden*** **(rawḍa)**, ***rejoicing*** **(yuḥbarūn)**. ***But as for those who were faithless and denied Our signs and the encounter of the***

Hereafter, they will be brought to the punishment.

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> *Rawḍa* means a garden of the utmost beauty and pleasantness.

In the *Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib says:

> *Ḥibr* means an embellishment… *in a garden rejoicing* means that they will rejoice in the garden until the embellishments of their comfort become apparent to them.

When God says that the creation will be divided on that day, He means that the faithful who did righteous deeds will be separated from the guilty sinners who will be admitted to hell while they are admitted to heaven. This is clearly shown by the following verses.

It is the necessity of this division and separation in existence that God takes as a proof of the Resurrection in the verse: *Do those who have perpetrated misdeeds suppose that We shall treat them as those who have faith and do righteous deeds, their life and death being equal? Evil is the judgement that they make!* (45:21)

فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ حِينَ تُمْسُونَ وَحِينَ تُصْبِحُونَ ﴿١٧﴾ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَعَشِيًّا وَحِينَ تُظْهِرُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

(30:17–18) ***So glory to Allah when you enter evening and when you rise at dawn—to Him belongs all praise in the heavens and the earth—and at nightfall and when you enter noontime.***

Above, God has said that He originated the creation and that He will return it and bring the creation back to Him. After this, He described how He will separate them into two groups: the inhabitants of paradise who will receive its blessings, and the inmates of hell who will endure its punishment. The inhabitants of paradise are the faithful who did righteous deeds, while the inmates of hell are the faithless who denied God's signs. They were those who, in this world, had power and wealth but forgot the Hereafter, denied God's signs and mocked them. As a result, their fate was the worst punishment—that of being utterly annihilated in this world—as a recompense for them wronging themselves, for God did not wrong them, rather it was they who wronged their own selves.

From all of this, we conclude that the realm of creation follows a divine plan of the utmost sublimity and represents the best of all possible

worlds. However, the human being, sadly, throughout history has been sinful in his behavior and errant in holding beliefs that are unworthy of his Lord—he has set up partners to Him, denied that he will encounter Him, not to mention his other misdeeds.

This discussion concludes by saying to glorify God as you are revived, moment after moment, and to praise Him for His artifice and governance in the heavens and the earth—representing the entirety of the visible world—for He is completely divested off these false beliefs and immoral deeds, and praiseworthy for all that He has created and directed in the heavens and the earth.

From this, the following becomes apparent:

First, that these two verses are God instructing the audience to praise and glorify Him rather than quoting the words of anyone else. With this in mind, the meaning is really: *Say*: glory to God… and *say*: to God belongs all praise… God frequently invokes His own praise and glory, as in the verse: *Glory to your Lord, the Lord of might…* (37:180) and *Blessed be Him who sent down the Criterion to His servant…* (25:1).

Second, that He means glorification and praise in general—not just the daily obligatory prayers. This is the interpretation of the majority of those who say that the implicit meaning of the verse is *Say*: glory to God…

Third, that the sentence *to Him belongs all praise in the heavens and the earth* is an interjection (*muʿtariḍa*) that occurs mid-sentence. This means that the words *and at nightfall and when you enter noontime* are actually attached to the phrase *…when you enter evening and when you rise at dawn* rather than *in the heavens and the earth*. Whereas, if they were attached to the latter, this would mean that the evening and dawn are reserved for glorifying Him while the heavens, the earth, noontime and nightfall would be reserved for praising Him. Of course, on the reading we have propounded, all times are for glorification and all places are for praise.

The tone of the verse suggests that the creation and command found throughout the heavens and the earth belong only to God, and their beauty should give people cause to praise and magnify Him. Meanwhile, the human being has—with the passage of the ages and the changing of times—associated partners with God and disobeyed Him in a manner that does not befit His divinity.

However, there is another way of looking at the way in which praise and glorification have been used; namely that despite the passage of time

and the changes it has wrought on some of the beings that dwell in the heavens and the earth, these nevertheless praise and magnify God through the mere fact of their existence. Then, everything in the heavens and the earth, through its existential poverty, its lowliness and its deficiency in comparison to His utter perfection, also glorifies Him, as in the verse: *There is not a thing but celebrates His praise* (17:44). Yet this point of view is not reflected in the two verses we are discussing here.

Commentators have given various different opinions about the above verse. We have already mentioned the most significant of them in the different aspects we considered.

In the Arabic, the word *ʿashiyyan* (at nightfall) is used adverbially rather than the construct *ḥīna tuẓhirūn* (when you enter noontime) because the root *ʿ-sh-y* cannot be conjugated into a verb on the pattern of *ifʿāl*, unlike *masāʾ* (evening), *ṣabāḥ* (morning) and *ẓahīra* (noontime), all of which can be conjugated on this pattern to produce a verb with the meaning of entering this time of day. This is the opinion mentioned by some.

Also, the fact that these verbs use the plural pronoun—*when you* [pl.] *enter evening…* is not a case of transitioning (*iltifāt*) from one addressee to another. Rather, it represents a broadening of the address that was originally directed to the Prophet from the beginning of the verse. This renders the meaning: "If this is the case, then God is glorified when you human beings enter the evening, the morning, and at night, and when you enter noontime. And to Him belongs all the beautiful praise in the heavens and the earth."

We can detect a similar broadening of the address in the verse …*then you will be brought back to Him* (30:11) and later, in the verse: …*you* [pl.] *shall be raised.*

يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَيُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ تُخْرَجُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(30:19) *He brings forth the living from the dead, and brings forth the dead from the living, and revives the earth after its death. Likewise you shall be raised!*

The apparent meaning of *brings forth the living from the dead* and the opposite is to create life from non-living earth and to transform living

creatures into non-living earth. It has also been interpreted to mean creating the believer from the disbeliever and the disbeliever from the believer, where "living" signifies the believer and "dead" signifies the disbeliever." This is akin to the verse: *Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave?* (6:122)

As for *revives the earth after its death*, this means to bring forth verdant vegetation during spring and summer after the land had been barren in autumn and winter. *Likewise you shall be raised* means you will be brought forth from your graves and resurrected with a new life, just as the earth is given a new life after its death. We have already dealt with verses similar to the beginning and end of this one several times in our commentary.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *The Romans have been vanquished* (30:2) Ibn ʿAbbās said: "They have been vanquished and will vanquish." He explained: "The idolaters had hoped the Persians would defeat the Romans, because they were idol worshipers, while the Muslims had hoped that the Romans would defeat the Persians, because they were people of a divine scripture. They mentioned this to Abū Bakr, who mentioned it to God's Messenger. God's Messenger said: "Well, they shall vanquish [the Persians.]" Abū Bakr related this to them, and they said: "Set a tryst between you and us. If we win then we shall have such-and-such. If you win, you shall have such-and-such." He set them a period of five years but they did not win. Abū Bakr mentioned this to God's Messenger who said: "How long have you made it for?" He said: "Less than ten." Then the Romans won after that. That was God's saying: *The Romans have been vanquished*. They were vanquished but later they were the vanquishers."

God says: *All command belongs to Allah, before and after, and on that day the faithful will rejoice at Allah's help* (30:4–5). Sufiyān said: "I heard that they were victorious on the day of the Battle of Badr."[1]

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1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, al-Tirmidhī (who has authenticated it), al-Nasāʾī, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ṭabarānī's

Author's comment: There are a number of other narrations in the same meaning as these quoted here. According to some, the bet was between Abū Bakr and Ubayy b. Khalaf; according to others, it was between the Muslims and the idolaters, with Abū Bakr representing the former and Ubayy the latter; still others say that it was between two tribes; and others say that it was between Abū Bakr and the idolaters, as the narration quoted above indicates.

Then, the appointed time for this bet is three years in some, five, six or seven in others. Some narrations say that at first it was seven years and came to an end while the Muslims were still in Mecca, so Abū Bakr extended it with them for another two years at the Prophet's command. Then the Romans were victorious. Other narrations say differently.

Once again, some narrations say that the extension ended while the Muslims were still in Mecca while others say it ended after the migration to Medina, and that the Roman victory was on the same day as the Battle of Badr, while others say it was on the same day as the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya.

Some say that when the Romans were victorious and Abū Bakr won the bet he took the wager from them, which was a hundred camels, and took it to the Prophet who said: "It is ill-gotten, so give it as charity."

However, what all narrations agree upon is that he made a bet with them which he won, and this bet was at the Prophet's instructions. The explanation given for this is that the story took place before the prohibition on gambling came into effect; gambling was prohibited along with wine in Sūrah al-Māʾida, which was revealed towards the end of the Prophet's life.

Readers will recall that when we dealt with the verse prohibiting wine and gambling we saw that wine was prohibited from the very beginning of the Prophet's mission, and one of the things everyone knew about his religion was that it forbade wine and fornication.

However, wine and gambling are considered sinful in the following verse of *Sūrah al-Baqara*: *They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say: There is a great sin in both of them…* (2:219) and sinfulness is forbidden according to the following verse of Sūrah al-Aʿrāf: *Say: My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, the outward among them and the inward ones, and sin and undue aggression…* (7:33). Moreover, Sūrah al-Aʿrāf was revealed

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al-Kabīr, al-Hākim (who has authenticated it), Ibn Mardawayh, al-Bayhaqī's *al-Dalāʾil* and *al-Ḍiyāʾ*.

in Mecca. Therefore, it is impossible that the Prophet would ever approve of his followers engaging in gambling, let alone instruct them to do it!

And if one was to argue that it was only prohibited at the end of his life, then his statement to Abū Bakr when he brought the winnings is problematic. Why would he say: "It is ill-gotten, so give it as charity" if it is permissible? In short, there is no way we can deem any of this authentic based on the criteria of jurisprudence; those who consider them authentic have given tortuous explanations that only compound the problem.

On top of this, the narration that said the Persians were idol worshipers is historically inaccurate; even if they could be called polytheists, they did not worship idols.

(2) Concerning the verse, *They know just an outward aspect of the life of the world, but they are oblivious of the Hereafter* (30:7) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: They see what is in front of them of this world and pay no mind to the Hereafter.

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq was once asked about the verse: *Have they not travelled in the land…?* He said: [It means] have they not considered the Qur'an?[1]

(4) Concerning the verse, *The day the Hour sets in, they will be divided on that day* (30:14) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: Between heaven and hell.

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1 *Al-Khiṣāl*.

Verses 20–26

This section of verses mentions a number of signs of God's oneness (*waḥdāniyya*) in lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and divinity (*ulūhiyya*). It highlights the perfect balance, harmony and governance of the Creation and thereby demonstrates only God is worthy of true lordship, in the sense of sovereignty over and governance of Creation, and divinity, in the sense of being the object of worship. In the same way, it also shows as false the claim of the idolaters that God is the sole creator but that governance and worship have been delegated to the deities of the idols so that these may be intercessors for them with God, who is only the Lord of lords and the God of gods.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ إِذَا أَنْتُمْ بَشَرٌ تَنْتَشِرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(30:20) ***And of His signs is that He created you from dust, then, behold, you are humans scattering!***

When God says that He created human beings from dust, He means that the human form will eventually return to the earth, as all the stages of human existence in this world are made from the elements of the earth and they will return to these elements in the end.

…then, behold, you are humans scattering! Behold (idhā) is to express surprise (*fujāʾiyya*) that you are humans scattering over the earth. In other words: what is created from inanimate matter is expected to be inanimate like the matter it is made from, so it should surprise you that it becomes a living, feeling, thinking human being that moves of the earth only to end up destroying life! Therefore, the phrase *…then, behold, you are humans scattering!* has the same meaning as the verse: *Then We produced him as another creature!* (23:14)

The creation of the human being, meaning the gathering and combination of his components from the earth, and then making this collection of matter into a living, feeling, thinking human being, is one of the signs of the existence of a wise and living Creator who directs the amazing natural order of the universe.

With this in mind, it becomes clear that the word *then* (*thumma*) in

the verse is to signify a gap and the order of events. The sentence beginning with it is connected to the sentence *He created you from dust…* rather than *Of His signs is that He created you…*

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ
بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(30:21) ***And of His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them, and He ordained affection and mercy between you. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> "Mate" (*zawj*) is used to refer to both male and female partners of all sexual animals. God says: …*and made of him the two sexes* [zawjayn]*, the male and the female* (75:39). And He says: …*dwell with your mate* [zawj] *in paradise* (2:35). *Zawja* (with the feminine *tāʾ*) is a colloquialism whose plural is *zawjāt*… the plural of *zawj* is *azwāj*.

Therefore *And of His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them* means He created partners for you—or for your benefit—from your own species; in other words, both the man and woman are able to produce offspring in partnership with the other. By themselves, each of them is incomplete and in need of the other but, together, they form a single complete unit that can make a child. It is because of this incompleteness that each of them moves towards the other and it is only when they meet that they find peace. After all, whatever is incomplete yearns to be whole and whatever is needy yearns to be fulfilled. This is the instinct implanted in each gender.

…and He ordained affection and mercy between you: It is as though affection (*mawadda*) refers to the visible effects of love in practice, so the relation of affection to love is like the relation of humility (*khuḍūʿ*) to awe (*khushūʿ*), which is a psychological state brought about by being in the presence of greatness. Meanwhile, mercy (*raḥma*) is the psychological state brought about by witnessing someone who is deprived of completeness and their need to alleviate their deficiency; this motivates a merciful person to save them from their deprivation and fulfil their needs.

One of the clearest exemplars of this affection and mercy is the family

unit, for the two partners are bound to one another through love and affection; both of them (and especially the wife) show kindness and mercy to their small children because they see that these children are unable to look after their own needs; so they do what is necessary to protect, nurture, shelter and educate them. Were it not for this mercy, the human race would cease to exist!

This affection and mercy can also be seen in society as a whole between the different members of society; members are affectionate to another and show mercy to those who are poor, infirm or weak and unable to look after themselves.

Based on the context of the verse, it appears that the first kind of affection and mercy is what intended. If, however, we take the verse on its own, then the latter meaning would be implied.

There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect: Because when they think about the cosmic principles which are at work in the existence of two sexes, which leads to the formation of households, the affection and mercy which fosters the appearance of societies, and the net result of this which is the continuation of the human species, and the fulfilment of individual human beings in their worldly and next-worldly lives, they have truly come upon wondrous signs that amaze their intellects and dazzle their minds.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ ۚ
إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِلْعَالِمِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(30:22) ***Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your tongues and colors. There are indeed signs in that for those who know.***

It appears that *the difference of your tongues* refers to the difference between the languages you speak, and …*colors* refers to different racial groups, such as white, black, yellow and red.

According to what scholars have said, *the difference of your tongues* could also suggest differences in accents, tone and manner of speaking, and *colors* to mean differences between all individual human beings; how each human being has his or her own unique shade of skin tone.

Those who study the macrocosm discover in the natural order such fine signs that the artifice and power they bear witness to could not be

from other than God nor return to any except Him.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ مَنَامُكُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَابْتِغَاؤُكُمْ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(30:23) ***And of His signs is your sleep by night and day, and your pursuit of His grace. There are indeed signs in that for a people who listen.***

"Grace" (*faḍl*) means something in excess of what is needed; it can be used in the sense of a gift because a person only gives a gift from whatever he has that is in excess of his needs. In this verse, the meaning is "sustenance" (*rizq*); pursuing His grace means seeking your sustenance.

In human nature there is a force that drives him to seek sustenance and meet his daily needs for survival through effort and toil. This same force then leads him to stop and rest to remove the tiredness of his striving and renew his vigor. The succession of days and nights that are set aside for effort and rest respectively, and the fact that these only exist on the earth by virtue of the movement of celestial bodies in the heavens are signs that will benefit one who listens attentively, reflects on what he hears and follows it if he finds it to be true.

Al-Zamakhsharī says in his *al-Kashshāf*:

> The verse contains a kind of envelopment. It begins by mentioning that amongst His signs is your sleep and your pursuit of His grace by night and day. However, He has separated the first pair of complimentary opposites with the latter pair, because the latter are times and time is identical with its contents. Therefore, by enveloping the times with the activities that take place in them, He is showing the two to be one and the same. It is also possible that He could mean your sleep during both times and your seeking His grace in both. However, the more apparent of the two meanings is the first because it is often repeated in the Qur'an and it is one of the most relevant ideas that the Qur'an calls attention to.

From this we can easily grasp why God ends this verse with the coda: *There are indeed signs in that for a people who listen.*

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ يُرِيكُمُ الْبَرْقَ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَيُنَزِّلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَيُحْيِي

بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(30:24) ***And of His signs is He shows you the lightning, in fear and hope, and He sends down water from the sky, and with it revives the earth after its death. There are indeed signs in that for a people who apply reason.***

In the Arabic it appears as though the verb *He shows you* stands in for an infinitive, as it does in the verses …*that He created you*… (30:20) and …*that He created for you*… (30:21). This device is an elegant way of using Arabic, as in the proverb: "Hearing Muʿīdī is better than to see him." And there is no doubt that this is how the verbs at the opening of these verses are being used.

It is possible that *He shows you* also has an implicit "that" (*an*), in which case the meaning becomes that *He shows you the lightning*… and this is strengthened by the fact that in some recitations *He shows you* is accusative.

It is also possible that there is an implicit possessive construct (*iḍāfa*), meaning "*And of His signs* is the sign of Him showing *you the lighting*…"; or that the intended meaning was "*And of His signs* was the sign of *lightning*"; or that *of His signs* is actually the object of the verb *He shows you* in which case the meaning becomes *And or He shows you or of His signs or the lightning*; or it is possible that *of His signs* is adverbial for *the lightning*, meaning: "And He shows you the lightning while lightning is one of His signs."

And it should be obvious to you, dear reader, how unlikely these readings are; some of them actually destroy the coherence between this verse and the one's before it—especially the last two.

In fear and hope—meaning in fear of the thunderclaps and in hope of the rain; *and He sends down water from the sky, and with it revives the earth after its death*—we have commented on this refrain several times before—*There are indeed signs in that for a people who apply reason*—meaning those who apply reason understand that there is a divine intelligence behind these phenomena; the benefits that come from them are no coincidence.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ تَقُومَ السَّمَاءُ وَالْأَرْضُ بِأَمْرِهِ ۚ ثُمَّ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ دَعْوَةً مِنَ الْأَرْضِ إِذَا أَنْتُمْ تَخْرُجُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(30:25) ***And of His signs is that the sky and the earth stand by His command, and then, when He calls you, calling forth from the earth, behold, you will come forth.***

"To stand" (*qiyām*) is the opposite of "to sit" (*quʿūd*). The former is the most upright posture of the human being because it is in that position that he is able to undertake most of his activities. This is why God uses it metaphorically to portray something as firmly established in the most upright fashion, just as He uses it metaphorically for looking after the affairs of something else. God says: *Is He who sustains every soul in spite of what it earns…* (13:33).

For the sky and the earth to stand by God's command means that they are firmly established in their condition; their movement and their stillness; their change and their stability; all is by His command. And we can know the nature of God's command from the verse: *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it Be, and it is* (36:82).

…and then* (idhā), *when He calls you, calling forth from the earth, behold* (idhā), *you will come forth: The first *idhā* (then) is conditional, the second is to express surprise (*fajāʾiyya*) and also fulfils the role of the particle of the consequent, *fāʾ*. *From the earth* is connected to *calling forth* and the sentence as a whole is joined to the grammatical position of the previous sentence (but not its meaning). This is because the sentence, *and then, when He calls you…* is speaking about the Resurrection and returning to God; this is not one of God's signs but rather something that God has presented proofs for before and will present proofs for later.

As for those who interpret this to be connected to the sentence …*that the sky and the earth stand…*, with the meaning: "And of his signs is that the sky and the earth stand by His command, and that you shall come forth from the earth when He calls you." However, this implies that the Resurrection is counted amongst God's signs, which is incorrect. This is because the Resurrection is one of the three fundamental beliefs (along with Divine Unity and Prophethood) which the signs are supposed to point to; Resurrection cannot, for example, be treated as a sign for Divine Unity because, if anything, Divine Unity points to the Resurrection.

The signs mentioned so far in this section; the creation of human beings from dust; their creation in two sexes; their different languages and colors; their sleep and seeking God's grace; lightning and rain from the heavens—all of these signs relate to looking after the affairs of the

human being. Therefore, based on the context, the phrase *that the sky and the earth stand by His command* means that they remain in their natural state which is conducive to human existence, which is connected to them. So when God says *then, when He calls you…*, this is something that will come to pass *after* the sky and the earth have stood by God's command. In other words, the Resurrection is concomitant with the destruction of the natural order. This is something to which many verses throughout the Qur'an have called attention.

From this it also becomes plain that when God says, *among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth* (30:22), this means their creation insofar as they are connected to human life and are of benefit to human beings.

These verses discuss the full spectrum of human existence, from the origin of the human species, to its diversity of genders, languages and colors, to its existence in the heavens and the earth, its quest for sustenance, and its slumber, before turning to the fact that the natural order—such as the flashing lightning and falling rain—will persist until a fixed time. All of this is to bring the human species to completion, and ultimately leads to the Resurrection.

God ends each section of signs with a different refrain; *reflect*, *know*, *listen* and *apply reason*. He uses this particular order to show that if a person reflects, he will gain knowledge. Then, when he hears some truths, he will understand them and comprehend them. And God knows best.

وَلَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ كُلٌّ لَهُ قَانِتُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(30:26) ***To Him belongs whoever is in the heavens and the earth. All are submissive to Him.***

As was indicated previously, the verses under consideration are intended to establish God's lordship and divinity. Once the discussion reaches the topic of the Resurrection and returning to God, this is followed by a logical proof of its possibility and an argument based on God's creation and governance of the cosmos which has just been demonstrated by the aforementioned signs.

When God says: *To Him belongs whoever is in the heavens and the earth*, it refers to the fact that His dominion encompasses everyone in the heavens and the earth and they will all be brought back to Him. This is because their existence, from every aspect, depends upon Him; everything

that exists stands in need of Him and cannot endure independently from Him in any way, shape or form. This is real dominion (*mulk ḥaqīqī*). And it logically follows that the sovereign (*mālik*) has the right to do as He pleases with His domain; therefore God can move His servants from this world to the Hereafter.

All are submissive to Him: According to what al-Rāghib has mentioned in the *Mufradāt*, "submissiveness" (*qunūt*) means to obey another with humility. Here, obedience with humility refers to a cosmic obedience—as suggested by the context—rather than moral obedience which, unlike the former kind, can be contravened.

This includes the angels, jinn and humans. It is the nature of the angels to submit to God, but humans and jinn obey because they are subject to the cosmic order, and whenever they try to prevent one cause having an effect, they do so by resorting to yet another cause in the same order. Their knowledge, desires and free-will are all part of this cosmic order and therefore only what God wills—namely that whose causes have obtained in objective reality—will come to pass. Nothing they desire or will to happen actually happens without God's leave. Therefore He is the true sovereign and master of both them and whatever they possess.

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Verses 27–39

The previous section set forth the argument for God's oneness and the Resurrection by adducing a number of signs that point to these realities—beginning with the verse *Of His signs is that He created you…* (30:20) and ending with the verse *To Him belongs whoever is in the heavens and the earth…* (30:26)—and these are all divine attributes of action. Now, the context of the argument has changed to invoke these divine attributes of action and present them in four sections until the end of the verse; each section contains some of the divine attributes of action that entail God's absolute oneness and point to the Resurrection, namely:

> *It is He who originates the creation, and then He will bring it back…* (30:27)
> *It is Allah who created you and then He provided for you…* (30:40)
> *He sends the winds…* (30:46)
> *It is Allah who created you from weakness…* (30:54)

The only reason this section of verses does not begin with the name *Allah* like the other sections is to match with the verse that comes immediately before it—*To Him belongs whoever is in the heavens and the earth. All are submissive to Him* (30:26)—which is like a divider between the two sections.

وَهُوَ الَّذِى يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ وَهُوَ أَهْوَنُ عَلَيْهِ ۚ وَلَهُ الْمَثَلُ الْأَعْلَىٰ فِى
السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٧﴾

(30:27) ***It is He who originates the creation, and then He will bring it back and that is more simple for Him. His is the loftiest description in the heavens and the earth. And He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.***

To originate the creation means to produce it without any prior likeness. To bring it back means to produce it after having produced it before.

That is more simple for him means bringing it back is simpler and easier for Him than originating it.

Some might object that this implies that His power is not absolute, as

all things should be the same before infinite power; one thing should be no more difficult than another. Therefore there is no sense in using the comparative *more simple* (ahwan) here.

One of the responses to this objection is that the pronoun in *for him* (ʿalayh) actually refers to the creatures (that is, "for it") rather than God. In other words, bringing something back is easier for creatures because it has already been originated once. This makes it easier to do again. Whereas producing something completely new is naturally more difficult. Therefore, this renders the meaning: "And bringing it back is easier for the creatures." Meaning if it is easier for creatures to bring things back, then what about the Creator bringing them back?

The problem with this reading is that making the pronoun refer to the creatures goes against the apparent meaning of the verse.

Another response is that *more simple* (ahwan) is being used in the sense of *very simple* rather than the comparative. This is like the verse: *What is with Allah is better than diversion* (62:11). However, this is completely arbitrary and there is no evidence for it.

Still another response is that the act of bringing it back is simpler *as an act* than producing something anew, not simpler *in relation to* God. There is no problem comparing two of His actions, as in the verse: *Surely the creation of the heavens and the earth is more prodigious than the creation of mankind…* (40:57).

This is what al-Zamakhsharī means when he says:

> Were you to say: "Why is it that bringing back is extolled in the verse *…and then, when He calls you…* as if this is greater than making the heavens and the earth stand by His command, but then it is described as something simple after that?" I would say: "The act of bringing back *in itself* is amazing, but *in relation to* producing something anew, it is easier."

The problem with this is that the verse qualifies the word *more simple* with the phrase *for him.* This is the best indicator that the comparison being made between origination and bringing back is in relation to God rather than between the acts themselves. Therefore, the objection stands.

Another suggestion is that the comparison is drawn with regards to the standards people use to judge actions, not to the fact of the matter. In everyday life they can see that to repeat something even once is easier than to do something the first time. So it is as if to say: "By your standards,

repeating it should be easier. But origination and bringing back are the same to God."

There is no problem with this meaning in of itself but there is nothing to suggest that this is what is meant in the text.

Still another answer is given by al-Zamakhsharī in his *al-Kashshāf*:

> Another meaning is that origination is a voluntary act in which the agent chooses between doing and not doing. However, the act of bringing back is something that must be done because it is to recompense people for their deeds, which is obligatory. Divine actions are either impossible (*muḥāl*), meaning they cannot be done at all, or something the All-Wise does not do, which means they are morally repugnant (*qabīḥ*), which is equivalent to impossibility because God does not do them, voluntary (*tafaḍḍul*) in that the agent chooses whether or not to do them, or obligatory (*wājib*) in which case they must be performed.
>
> Obligatory acts are those furthest from impossibility and nearest to obtaining in reality. Therefore, insofar as bringing back the creation is an obligatory act, it is the furthest from impossibility (while originating it is merely voluntary) and this has been expressed as it being "easier" for God.

The problems with this theory are, first, that it is based on some things having priority rather than being obligatory, which has been shown as false elsewhere.

Second, the idea of something being near or far from instantiation in reality is a purely mental abstraction, while ease and difficulty are real qualities with which a thing's existence can be described in relation to the agent responsible for producing it, and a real quality does not depend on a mental abstraction.

Third, originating the creation is the same as bringing it back insofar as it is based on some purpose; if the creation did not have some purpose, it would not have come to be, as is the case with bringing it back. Therefore they are equally distant from being impossible based on the above.

Fourth, this reading implies that bringing back is easier than originating in of their own selves rather than in relation to God. In reality, this means that this devolves to the third explanation (above), which we have already dealt with.

Instead, what should be said is that the sentence *That is more simple*

for Him is that its rationale is given by the sentence immediately after: *His is the loftiest description in the heavens and the earth. And He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.*

His is the loftiest description… is that every attribute of perfection represented by any being in the heavens and the earth, whether life, power, knowledge, sovereignty, generosity, kindness, greatness, majesty etc. belongs to God in an even higher and loftier form than that found in those limited beings. This is like when God says: *To Allah belong the Best Names…* (7:180).

This is because every entity that possesses an attribute of perfection (*ṣifat al-kamāl*) in the heavens and the earth contains the opposite of this attribute in its own self. So it is something that God has bestowed on it that it does not possess inherently; all living things are dead in essence and all powerful things are impotent in essence. Therefore, whatever attribute of perfection they possess is limited and deficient; they possess it in one sense but not another, at one time but not at another. The same applies to knowledge; the knowledge of all creatures is limited and mixed with ignorance. So too is life, power, sovereignty, greatness and any other attribute.

God is the one who bestows these qualities out of His grace. But He possesses them in an absolutely pure and unlimited sense. There is no ignorance for His knowledge, no death for His life. Therefore, whatever attribute limited beings possess, He possesses it in its highest and absolute sense.

Therefore, insofar as bringing something back is classed as easy compared to producing it anew for the first time amongst His creatures, for Him it must be even easier. In fact, unlike for us, it is pure ease without difficulty. This does not imply that origination is harder for Him because difficulty is inversely proportional to the power of the agent; the weaker the agent the greater the difficulty and vice versa. Infinite power means there is no difficulty whatsoever and, therefore, no action is difficult for Him; *Allah has power over all things* (5:40) and power over all things means infinite power.

So, as we have said, *His is the loftiest description in the heavens and the earth* serves as a proof for *That is more simple for Him* and the short form of this proof is that every attribute of perfection possessed by any being in the heavens or the earth, whether beautiful or awe-inspiring, its highest, most absolute and undiluted form belongs to God.

And He is the All-mighty, the All-wise: This explains the rationale for *His is the loftiest description…* In other words, He is All-mighty because He has everything that others lack and therefore none can constrain Him, and He is All-wise because His actions are flawless. And were any of His attributes less than the highest form of what other contingent beings possess, then it would be limited, imperfect and diluted by imperfection and deficiency. This would mean that He was not the All-mighty, and this would render His actions imperfect, in which case He would not be the All-wise.

ضَرَبَ لَكُمْ مَثَلًا مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ ۖ هَلْ لَكُمْ مِنْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ
مِنْ شُرَكَاءَ فِي مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ فَأَنْتُمْ فِيهِ سَوَاءٌ تَخَافُونَهُمْ كَخِيفَتِكُمْ
أَنْفُسَكُمْ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(30:28) ***He draws for you an example from yourselves: Do you have among your slaves* (min mā malakat aymānukum)** ***any partners* (min shurakāʾ)** ***in what We have provided you, so that you* (antum)** ***are equal in its respect, and you fear them as you fear one another? Thus do We elaborate the signs for a people who apply reason.***

From yourselves means an example taken from your own circumstances. *Do you…?* marks the beginning of the example being given; it is a rhetorical question intended to evoke denial. The *mā* in *min mā malakat* is for category, meaning among the category of your slaves. The *min* in *min shurakāʾ* is superfluous (*zāʾidah*) and it is the subject of the sentence. *So that you are equal in its respect* follows logically from the idea of partnership. The pronoun "you" (*antum*) includes both masters and slaves. *And you fear them as you fear one another* means you fear using the property you share without their permission just as you, as free men, fear using one another's property without the other's permission.

God strikes this parable to demonstrate the falsity of their claim that He has partners amongst His creatures who share His divinity and lordship. This is given in the form of a rhetorical question that evokes denial: "Do you have slave men and women who share the property We gave to you while you own them and their possessions, in such a way that you fear disposing of your property without their permission just as you would

fear disposing of property you share with men of your own rank?" This is, of course, impossible. No master would make his slave a partner in his wealth. Therefore how can they allow that some part of God's creation, such as the angels or jinn, who are His servants, have a share in His domain and become gods or lords in their own right?

He ends with the refrain: *Thus do We elaborate the signs for a people who apply reason.* This lays the ground for what follows.

بَلِ اتَّبَعَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۖ فَمَنْ يَهْدِي مَنْ أَضَلَّ اللَّهُ ۖ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(30:29) ***Rather the wrongdoers follow their own desires without any knowledge. So who will guide those whom Allah has led astray? They will have no helpers.***

Rather turns the discourse away from the end of the previous verse, with the implication that the polytheists do not have any rational basis for their beliefs. Instead they follow their own desires without knowledge.

From the apparent sense of the text, it would have seemed fitting to say, "Rather the polytheists…" instead of *Rather the wrongdoers…* God has attributed them with wrongdoing as an explanation of why they are astray in the next sentence (*So who will guide those whom Allah has led astray?*) as it is wrongdoing that invites God to lead people astray, as we read in the verse: *Allah fortifies those who have faith with an immutable word in the life of this world and in the Hereafter, and Allah leads astray the wrongdoers, and Allah does whatever He wishes* (14:27).

So who will guide those whom Allah has led astray? A rhetorical question implying that there is no hope of guidance for the polytheists who follow their own desires, despite the obviousness of the truth, and this is because of their wrongdoing which has caused them to be led astray. It is often repeated in the Qur'an: *Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot* (3:86).

They will have no helpers means they will not be saved by anyone else helping them if they have not saved themselves from error and its consequences because God has misguided them. The plural *they* is used to signify that their group will have no helpers, but others will, such as those who receive intercession.

Some have suggested that this means none of them will have a single helper. However, according to the common usage of language, juxtaposing

one plural with another is not without exceptions.

So the verse means: "Rather those who were wrongdoers by associating partners with God followed their desires without knowledge or reason, so God led them astray because of their wrongdoing. Now there is no guide to guide them or helpers to help them."

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۚ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(30:30) ***So set your face toward the religion upright* (ḥanīfan)*, the origination* (fiṭra) *of Allah according to which He originated mankind. There is no altering Allah's creation; that is the upright religion, but most people do not know.***

This verse follows logically from the conclusions drawn in the previous verse. In other words: "If it is established that all creation and governance of the cosmos are God's alone without any partner; that He will resurrect mankind and hold them to account for their deeds, and that there is no salvation for anyone who turns away from Him for another, then set your face toward the religion and hold fast to it, for this is the religion which divine creation calls you toward."

Some have said that this verse follows from the sense of consolation in the previous verses. Those verses showed the truth and explained that the polytheists only followed their desires because of their wrongdoing and turned away from good sense. As a result, God misguided them and did not permit any helper to help or guide them, nor for any saviour to save them from their error, whether you or anyone else. Do not worry about them. Worry about yourself and your faithful followers, and set your face and those who follow you toward the religion.

So set your face toward the religion… means to be attentive to the religion; just as when someone faces an object by focusing their gaze on it without turning left or right. The definite article in *the religion* suggests that this is referring to Islam.

Upright—is an adverb for the subject of the verb *set*, although it could also be an adverb for *the religion* or *face*. However the first is the apparent meaning and most apposite for the context. *Ḥanīf* comes from a root

meaning to incline both of one's feet to the middle and it conveys the sense of "uprightness" (*iʿtidāl*).

…the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind: *Fiṭra* means the way in which something was originated. *The origination of Allah* is accusative due to *ighrāʾ* (lit. "instigation"). In other words: "Hold fast to the origination of God." This suggests that it is God-given human nature (*fiṭra*), in which there is no change, that guides human beings to follow this religion.

This is because religion is nothing other than a way of living and a path which a person follows to attain happiness in their life. There is no goal for a human being who follows it other than happiness. All manner of creatures have been guided to their happiness, which varies according to their innate nature, but each has been given what it needs to reach this goal. God says: *Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it* (20:50). And: *…who created and proportioned, who determined and guided…* (87:3).

Therefore, the human being—like all creatures—is originated with a nature (*fiṭra*) that directs her to complete her deficiencies and fulfil her needs, and tells her what is to her benefit and detriment in her life. God says: *…by the soul and that which fashioned it…* (91:7). In addition to this, she is endowed with all the abilities necessary to follow this nature; *Then He made the way easy for him…* (80:20).

So human nature guides the human being to a specific way of living, to a particular path with a single destination that she must follow to the exclusion of all else—*the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind.* The human beings who dwell in this stage of existence all belong to a single species; there is no difference in what harms and benefits them with regards to this form of existence composed of a spirit and a body. Therefore, happiness is one and the same for all human beings *qua* human beings, and misery is one and the same too. Therefore, the general principles on which human beings base their actions must be one and the same and the guide that leads them towards these, one and the same too.

This guide is none other than human nature, which is why God follows the words *the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind* with the refrain: *There is no altering Allah's creation.*

If human happiness differed from one person to another, it would be impossible for a single society to exist that was capable of guaranteeing

the happiness of its members. On the other hand, if it differed from one region to another, meaning that this is the sole basis for social living, then religion would be based on the whatever was the case in that region and the human being would not be a single species but many—one species for each region. Then, if it differed from one time to another, such that the epoch was the sole basis of social life, then each generation would be a different species to the one before it. In this case there would be no progress in human society; humanity would not move from deficiency towards perfection, as this is only possible if there is a single frame of reference.

This is not to say that differences between individuals, places and times don't have any influence on people's ways of living. All this means is that humanity, which is the foundation of the religious way of life, is a single stable reality shared between all human beings. Therefore, the correct way for human beings to live is also a single, stable way of life, based on the stability of its foundations—namely the human being. It is around this axis that the wheel of humanity turns, as well as the ways of living that are particular to different individuals, times and places.

It is to this that God alludes when He says: …*that is the upright religion, but most people do not know*. We shall discuss this further in a dedicated treatise, God-willing.

There are a number of different opinions about the phrases found in this verse and their meaning. For instance, some say that "to set your face" means to act in the right way, as the face represents what a person pays attention to (namely his action) and "to set" it means to do it right.

However, the "face" (*wajh*) of action (*ʿamal*) is its goal and this is not the action itself. Also, the verse says *Set your face…* not "Set the face of your action…"

Another is that *the origination of Allah* is accusative with the meaning of "I mean…" and the meaning of *fiṭra* is "creed" (*milla*). This makes the meaning: "Remain upright for the religion, meaning the creed upon which God created mankind. There is no change to God's creation."

However, this depends on a different understanding of *fiṭra* as "creed." But when God says *faṭara al-nās*, this is taken to mean creation or composition, and this contradicts the apparent meaning of the verse. On the other hand, if *faṭara al-nās* was understood in the sense of "the religion given to mankind by God" (meaning Divine Unity or *tawḥīd*), the phrase *there is no altering Allah's creation* would not fit with this.

Still another contradiction is interpreting "religion" (*dīn*) to mean Divine Unity. But, if it was interpreted to mean Islam or religion in general and *fiṭra* was left with its original meaning (creation), then you could not say that *the origination of Allah* is accusative with the meaning of "I mean…," as religion in this sense is not the same as *fiṭra* in the sense of creation.

Another reading is that *fiṭra* is a permutation (*badal*) of *upright* (*ḥanīf*) and its meaning is "creed" (*milla*). This has the same problems as we mentioned above.

Still another reading is that *fiṭra* is an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*) for an implicit verb, with the meaning: "God originated an origination upon which He originated mankind…"—the invalidity of such a reading should not need explaining.

Another reading is that it means: "Follow the religion that your God-given *fiṭra* leads you to, namely that which the origin of all things leads you to because He created them, combined them and shaped them in such a way that points to the existence of a single, eternal All-powerful, All-knowing, All-living Creator who resembles nothing and whom nothing resembles.

However this depends on *fiṭra* being accusative with the meaning of "follow *the origination of Allah*…" This has been mentioned by Abū al-Sʿūd and Abū Muslim al-Mufassir before him. In this case, "following" the *fiṭra* means following the innate created nature. The absence of any alteration in God's creation means that it never stops pointing towards a Creator with certain attributes. This is very close to the meaning we presented for the verse when we said that *fiṭra* was accusative due to *ighrāʾ*. However, this reading runs into the problem that the verse has a general meaning and there is nothing to suggest that its meaning is particular to belief in Divine Unity.

Another reading is that the "negation" (*lā*) in *There is no altering Allah's creation* indicates prohibition. In other words: "Do not alter God's creation." Meaning do not alter His religion which He has ordered you to follow, or do not alter His creation by denying that it points to His unity. Part of this is the opinion attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās that this prohibits castration.

However, there is nothing to suggest that *creation* (khalq) is being used in the sense of religion, nor is there any reason to call rejecting the

implications of creation *alteration* (*tabdīl*). As for what has been attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, this is obviously invalid.

Another reading is mentioned by Fakhr al-Rāzī in *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*:

> It could be said that God created the creation to worship Him and they are all His servants. *There is no altering Allah's creation* means that their servanthood in relation to God is not like that of a slave in relation to a human master; the latter can be given to another master or be freed from slavery, whereas there is no escape from worshiping and serving God. This exposes as false the claim that worship is to attain perfection and the servant becomes perfect through worship and then there is no moral duty (*taklīf*) upon him; and the claim of the idolaters that one who is imperfect cannot approach God, rather the human beings are servants of the stars and the stars are God's servants; and the claim of the Christians that God dwelt in Jesus and Jesus became God. So he said: *There is no altering Allah's creation*—rather all of them are God's servants now and forever.

However, this draws a false analogy between cosmic sovereignty and servanthood and moral sovereignty and servanthood; God's sovereignty cannot be transferred to another or invalidated because the existence of all things is only through Him. And the worship all things offered to Him is cosmic worship, meaning that their essences are humbled before Him and not subject to change or removal. This is as God says in the verse: *There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification* (17:44). As for religious worship which can be altered or removed, this is moral worship and servanthood. So keep this in mind.

If the phrase *There is no altering Allah's creation* indicates that there is no change to sovereignty, worship and servanthood in relation to God, this would refer to the cosmic variety of these, while the opinions Rāzī presents in his commentary relate to the moral variety.

مُنِيبِينَ إِلَيْهِ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(30:31) ***turning to Him in penitence, and be wary of Him, and maintain the prayer, and do not be among the polytheists,***

Here the pronouns are plural, signifying a shift in address from the Prophet to the audience as a whole. This is like the verses:

O Prophet! When you [pl.] *divorce women…* (65:1)
So be steadfast, just as you [sing.] *have been commanded, and whoever has turned [to Allah] with you* [sing.]*, and do not overstep* [pl.] *the bounds.* (11:112)

With this in mind, the meaning of the previous verse becomes: "So set your face upon the religion upright, you and those with you, turning to Him in penitence…"

…and be wary of Him, and maintain the prayer…: Based on the context, to be wary of God here includes obeying His commands and observing His prohibitions; prayer is singled out for particular mention because of its importance as a pillar of the religion.

…and do not be among the polytheists: Again, polytheism is singled out amongst all prohibited things for the same reason that prayer is singled out amongst all acts of worship, as associating partners with God is one of the most severe sins; *Indeed Allah does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but He forgives anything besides that to whomever He wishes…* (4:48)

مِنَ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيَعًا ۖ كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(30:32) ***of those who split up their religion and became sects: each faction exulting in what it possessed.***

Here, "of" (*min*) is for exposition and *of those who split up their religion* explains the nature of the polytheists, defining them by the most specific feature of their religion, namely that they are divided in their religion into different grounds and sects, with each one exulting in their own religion. The reason for this is what God has said above: *Rather the wrongdoers follow their own desires without any knowledge. So who will guide those whom Allah has led astray? They will have no helpers* (30:29). This shows that they founded their religion on their own desires; therefore, it will not guide them and nor will anyone else.

It is well known that the soul's low desires vary from one person to another, from one moment to another and from one state to another. If these desires are the basis of religion, then it will constantly be changing according to people's whims and desires. In this case there is no difference between true religion or false religion when these are built on desires.

From this, therefore, it is clear that the prohibition on splitting up the

religion is really a prohibition on basing one's religion on desires rather than intellect.

It is possible that this verse is detached from the one before it and represents a separate statement, but this does not match the context.

This verse also rebukes the polytheists for their division and partisanship in the matter of religion.

وَإِذَا مَسَّ النَّاسَ ضُرٌّ دَعَوْا رَبَّهُمْ مُنِيبِينَ إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا أَذَاقَهُمْ مِنْهُ رَحْمَةً إِذَا فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(30:33) ***When distress touches people, they supplicate their Lord, turning to Him in penitence. Then, when He lets them taste His mercy, behold, a part of them ascribe partners to their Lord.***

The word "touches" (*mass*) is used to imply the lightness of the distress; "distress" and "mercy" are indefinite for the same reason. This renders the meaning of the verse: "When some distress afflicts people, even a little bit such as illness, hardship or poverty, they will call on their Lord, God, even though they will return to others. And when He lets them taste mercy from Him, there are a group of those people who called on their Lord and acknowledged His lordship who now associate partners with Him. In other words, they are ungrateful for His blessings by their actions, even if they acknowledge them when they are in hardship. God says *a part of them* because some of them are not like that."

لِيَكْفُرُوا بِمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ ۚ فَتَمَتَّعُوا فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(30:34) ***Let them be ungrateful*** **(li yakfurū)** ***toward what We have given them. So enjoy! Soon they will know!***

This is a warning to those polytheists when God lets them taste mercy. The *lām* in *li yakfurū* is for the imperative. *So enjoy!* follows on from this and it is another imperative. Both imperatives are meant as a threat, and there is a transition from a third-person command to a second-person command to convey God's anger at their negligence and disregard of His command; they only call on Him in times of difficulty and become ungrateful in times of ease.

أَمْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانًا فَهُوَ يَتَكَلَّمُ بِمَا كَانُوا بِهِ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(30:35) ***Or have We sent down to them any authority which might speak of what they associate with Him?***

Or is truncated (*munqatiʿ*), marking the beginning of a new discussion. "Sending down" is a figurative way of saying "inform." Authority (*sulṭān*) means evidence. "Speak" is a figurative way of saying "prove." The meaning of the verse is: "Or have we informed them of some evidence which proves what they associate with God?"

Alternatively, "authority" could mean "a possessor of authority" in the sense of a sovereign, in which case "sending down" and "speak" are not figurative. The verse would then mean: "Rather have We sent down a sovereign who speaks of what they associate?"

وَإِذَا أَذَقْنَا النَّاسَ رَحْمَةً فَرِحُوا بِهَا ۖ وَإِنْ تُصِبْهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ
إِذَا هُمْ يَقْنَطُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(30:36) ***And when*** **(idhā)** ***We let people taste mercy, they exult in it; but should [in] an ill visit them because of what their hands have sent ahead, behold*** **(idhā)***, they become despondent!*

"Taste" (*idhāqa*) like "touch" suggests the slightest amount.

The first *idhā* is conditional, the second is for astonishment. The contrast between the use of *idhā* in tasting mercy and *should an ill visit them* is to show that God's mercy is abundant and certain, while ill is scarce and merely possible. Mercy is also attributed to God but not ill because mercy is something real (*wujūdī*) that overflows from Him while ill is something privative (*ʿadamī*), namely the absence of something overflowing from Him. That is why God gives *because of what their hands have sent ahead* as the reason for this ill, but gives no reason for His mercy to show that His mercy is pure grace (*tafaḍḍul*) and needs no reason.

Moreover, God says that people "exult" (*fariḥū*) in mercy while they *become despondent* (idhā hum yaqnaṭūn) to show that this is an unexpected occurrence, for both mercy and ill are in God's hands but mercy is more abundant. This is why He has used the present tense for the latter to show that it is transient.

What this verse is saying is that people do not look beyond the appearance of comfort and hardship; when they find what they want they become happy without considering that this is in God's hands and dependent

upon His will; and when they do not find what they want, they become despondent as if this was not also God's will. Therefore they are people of appearances who exist on the surface of things.

This shows that there is no contradiction between this verse and the above one: *When distress touches people, they supplicate their Lord, turning to Him in penitence* (30:33). This is because the meaning of this verse is that their understanding is very shallow; when they find what they want they are happy and when they do not they are despondent; while the meaning of the other verse is that if they find what they want they are happy and if they do not, they call on God despondent and turning to Him in penitence. So there is no contradiction.

To avoid the apparent contradiction, some might interpret the "people" in this verse to refer to a different group to the "people" mentioned in the one above or, assuming they are actually one and the same, interpret the verses as referring to two different states they find themselves in.

Another suggestion to resolve the apparent conflict is that supplication (*duʿāʾ*) is something uttered while despondence is something felt in the heart. However, the flaws in both of these interpretations should be obvious.

Yet another interpretation is that their becoming despondent means that they act in this way by hoarding possessions when they are wealthy. However, as well as there not being any evidence for this reading in the verse, this also doesn't match the surprise being expressed at this despondency.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(30:37) ***Do they not see that Allah expands the provision for whomever He wishes, and tightens it? There are indeed signs in that for a people who have faith.***

This shows why they are in error for being so quick to exult or despair, as the expansion and contraction of provision (*rizq*) depends entirely on God's will. Therefore, a person should know that whatever mercy they taste or ill they suffer, it could be removed by God; there is no point in exulting in something that could be lost or despairing over something that might be alleviated.

And even though a person's provision might appear as something visible and certain, this provision that a person obtains or earns actually depends upon millions of factors of which the person himself is only one, and whatever it is that reassures him of his provision is actually only one of these factors too. And all of them ultimately devolve to God, for it is He who gives and withholds and He who expands and contracts a person's provision. The rest of the verse is clear.

فَآتِ ذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ وَالْمِسْكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ ۖ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

(30:38) ***Give the relative his right, and the needy and the traveller. That is better for those who seek Allah's pleasure, and it is they who are the felicitous.***

A relative (*dhū al-qurbā*) is someone related by blood. A needy person (*miskīn*) is in a worse state than a poor one (*faqīr*). The traveller (*ibn al-sabīl*) is a needy wayfarer. God says "his right" (*haqquhu*) to show that a relative has an inalienable right. The verse is addressed to the Prophet, so the apparent meaning of the verse—based on the context in which it occurs—is that it is speaking about *khums* and the moral duty it legislates is first for the Prophet and then for whoever is responsible for *khums* after him. In any case, *the relative* here means the relatives of the Prophet, as indicated in the verse of *khums*. This is all assuming that the verse is Medinan in providence. However, if it is Meccan like the other verses of this sūrah, then the verse concerns generosity to relatives, the needy and travellers in a general sense.

And because of the generality of the verse, the beautiful effects of it are also generalized: *That is better for those who seek Allah's pleasure, and it is they who are the felicitous.*

وَمَا آتَيْتُمْ مِنْ رِبًا لِيَرْبُوَ فِي أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ فَلَا يَرْبُو عِنْدَ اللَّهِ ۖ وَمَا آتَيْتُمْ مِنْ زَكَاةٍ تُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُضْعِفُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(30:39) ***That which you give in ribā' in order that it may increase* (li yarbū)** ***people's wealth does not increase with Allah. But what you pay as zakāt seeking Allah's pleasure it is they who will be given a manifold increase.***

The word *ribāʾ* literally means for wealth to grow, and God says *li yarbū* to illustrate why it has been given this name. This means that the wealth that you give to people so that they may increase their wealth, rather than for the sake of God (based on the juxtaposition of *…seeking Allah's pleasure…*) does not increase or grow with God. In other words, you will not be rewarded for it because you have not done it for God.

But what you pay as zakāt seeking Allah's pleasure it is they who will be given a manifold increase: Here, *zakāt* means any kind of charity, in other words: Giving wealth for the sake of God without squandering it. "A manifold increase" means to be doubled. So the general sense of the verse is: "Whatever you give of your wealth as charity seeking God's pleasure, they are those whose wealth or reward will be doubled."

Based on the juxtaposition of the two terms and the context in which they occur, *ribāʾ* and *zakāt* refer to permitted *ribāʾ* (a gift given without the intention of seeking God's pleasure), while charity is giving one's wealth seeking God's pleasure. This is all assuming that the verse is Meccan. However, if it is Medinan then the meaning of *ribāʾ* is forbidden usury and the meaning of *zakāt* is the obligatory *zakāt*.

This verse and the one before it bear a closer resemblance to Medinan verses rather than Meccan ones, and there is no validity for what is claimed on the basis of narrations or consensus about their provenance.

Examining Narrations

(1) God's Messenger stood up to deliver a sermon, and at the end of his sermon, he said: We are the word of godwariness (*kalimat al-taqwā*), the way of guidance (*sabīl al-hudā*), the loftiest description (*al-muthul al-aʿlā*), the greatest proof (*al-ḥujjat al-ʿuẓmā*) and the firmest handhold (*al-ʿurwat al-wuthqā*)…[1]

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says that the occasion of revelation for the verse *He draws for you an example from yourselves* (30:28) was that the Quraysh used to perform Hajj in the way of Abraham, proclaiming his slogan (*talbiyya*): "We come, O God! We come! We come! You have no partner! We come! Praise, blessings and sovereignty belong to you! You have no partner!"
Then Iblīs came in the form of an old man and altered their slogan

1 *Al-ʿUyūn*, on the authority of ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿAbbās.

to his words: "We come! O God! You have no partner except your partner! His sovereignty is yours!" The Quraysh recited this slogan until God's Messenger was sent and rebuked them, saying: "This is polytheism!"

So God sent down the verse: *He draws for you an example from yourselves: Do you have among your slaves any partners in what We have provided you, so that you are equal in its respect…* meaning would you share your property with a partner? So how can you make a partner for one whose claim is even greater than yours?

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said about the verse, *So set your face toward the religion upright* (30:30): This is *wilāyah*.[1]

(4) Hishām b. Sālim says: I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about the phrase *the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind*. He said: "Divine Unity."[2]

(5) Imam al-Bāqir said: The code (*sharīʿa*) of Noah was to worship God with divine unity, dedication and without idolatry. This is the origination upon which mankind was originated.[3]

(6) Imam al-Bāqir said concerning the verse: *the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind*: It is "There is no god but God, Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, ʿAlī, the Commander of the Faithful, is God's ally (*walī*)." Until here is Divine Unity.[4]

Author's comment: The *fiṭra* equating to the three testimonies of faith means that the human being is naturally inclined to acknowledge that God has no partner because of his need that leads him to reflect upon

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration. *Al-Kāfī* has also narrated this from the Imam, on the authorities of al-Ḥalabī and Zurārah. Al-Ṣadūq has also reported a similar narration from the Imam in *al-Tawḥīd*, on the authorities of al-ʿAlāʾ b. Fuḍayl, Zurārah and Bukayr.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ismāʿīl al-Juʿfī.

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Haytham al-Rummānī, from Imam al-Riḍā, from his father, from his grandfather. Words to this effect have also been narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *Baṣāʾir al-Darajāt*, and from Imam al-Bāqir in *al-Tawḥīd*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, the bondsman of the Imam.

the things upon which he depends and beyond that, ultimately leading him to believe in divine unity; meanwhile, his innate deficiency means he is aware of his need for a religion that will complete him, leading him to believe in prophethood; and perhaps he feels that he needs to be under God's direct authority when arranging his life in accordance with religion; this is successorship (*wilāya*) and the one who opened the door of *wilāya* in Islam is ᶜAlī This is the meaning of the tradition and not that every human being who has ever existed naturally believed in these three testimonies of faith.

This also how we must understand the above narration that said this verse refers to *wilāya*, as this also entails divine unity and prophethood. The same is true of those traditions which said *fiṭra* referred to divine unity, as divine unity is to proclaim the oneness of God along with His attributes of perfection, which necessarily entail belief in resurrection, prophethood and *wilāya*. Therefore the root of all these explanations of this verse are one and the same.

(7) Zurārah said: I asked Imam al-Bāqir about the verse *the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind* and he said: He originated them upon the knowledge that He is their Lord. Were it not for this, then none of them would have known who was their Lord and provider.[1]

(8) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: God created people, all of them, upon the origination upon which He originated them. They did not know faith in a religion or disbelief through obstinacy. Then God sent messengers who summoned His servants to believe in Him and amongst them were those whom God guided and amongst them were those whom He did not guide.[2]

Author's comment: There are other narrations with a similar meaning that relate to the verse *Mankind were but a single community* (2:213). The meaning of these narrations is that the original human (*al-insān al-fiṭrī*) was a simple being who lived according to his innate nature, uncorrupted by errors in thinking or selfish desires. He was, in this potential state, very close to realizing the basics of true beliefs and the general precepts

1 *Al-Maḥāsin*.

2 *Al-Kāfī* via its chain of narrators, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Nuᶜaym al-Saḥḥāf.

of the divine codes as he lived and moved according to his innate human nature. However, as for being guided to the specifics of true beliefs and the detailed prescriptions of the divine codes, this required special guidance from God in the form of sending prophets.

(9) God's Messenger said: *The origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind*. That is God's religion.[1]

(10) Abū Hurayrah said: God's Messenger said: "No child is born save upon *fiṭra*. It is her parents who make her a Jew, a Christian or a Magian—just as an animal gives birth to a complete offspring, do you see them give birth to one without limbs?" Abū Hurayrah added: "Read, if you will, the verse *the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind*."[2]

(11) In another version the Prophet said: "Every child is born upon *fiṭra*. It is her parents that make her a Jew or a Christian. Just as a camel gives birth to complete offspring. Do you see one born without limbs?"[3]

(12) God's Messenger said: "Every child is born upon *fiṭra*." Meaning with the knowledge that God is her creator…[4]

(13) God's Messenger said: Do not strike your children when they cry, for their cries for the first four months are the testimony: *There is no Allah but Allah*. For the next four months they are invoking blessings upon the Prophet. And for the next four months they are praying for their parents.[5]

Author's comment: This is a very subtle narration. It means that for the first four months the child knows no one, she only senses her need and seeks to fulfil it by crying. The one who fulfils it is God; He looks after

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1 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ḥammād b. ʿAmr al-Ṣaffār, on the authority of Qatādah, on the authority of Anas b. Mālik.

2 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh.

3 *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Mālik, Abū Dāwud and Ibn Mardawayh on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Zurārah, from Imam al-Bāqir.

5 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿUmar.

her and she bears witness to His oneness.

In the next four months, she knows that her parents are intermediaries between her and the one who looks after he needs, without knowing them personally. And an intermediary between her and her Lord can only be the Prophet, so her crying then is asking for mercy for the Prophet so that it might reach her through him.

Finally, in the next four months, she can recognize her parents personally, so then her crying becomes a supplication for them and asking for mercy to flow to her through them from God. This tradition contains the subtlest references to how mercy flows forth from God to His creation through intermediaries. So reflect on this.

(14) Concerning the verse, *Give the relative his right* (30:38) it is narrated that when this verse was revealed to the Prophet he gave Fāṭima Fadak.[1]

(15) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: There are two kinds of *ribāʾ*, one which is eaten and one which is not. The one which is eaten is a gift you give to someone seeking a reward better than it. This is the *ribāʾ* which is eaten and it is God's saying: *That which you give in ribāʾ in order that it may increase people's wealth does not increase with Allah* (30:39). As for the *ribāʾ* which is not eaten, it is that which God has forbidden and threatened the punishment of Hellfire as a recompense for it.[2]

(16) Concerning the verse, *it is they who will be given a manifold increase*, Imam ʿAlī said: God enjoined prayer to remove pride, *zakāt* to bring provision, fasting as a trial to purify one's character, and maintaining kinship ties to increase the number of people.[3]

(17) Part of Lady Fāṭimah's sermon was: God enjoined faith to purify people of polytheism, prayer to free them from pride and *zakāt*

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1 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, from and Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī and others.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibrāhīm al-Yamānī. This is also narrated from the Imam *al-Tahdhīb*, on the authority of Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar; and in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth. It is also narrated from from Imam al-Bāqir in *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, via an incomplete chain of narration (*mursal*).

3 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*.

to increase their provision.[1]

In What Way is Religion Innate?

When we ponder on all the different kinds of existent entities, whether plants, animals or minerals, all of these come into being and gradually move towards perfection, we find that each species follows a particular path in its existence. This path has a succession of stages, and the species approaches its perfection with each passing stage until it reaches the last of these, which represents its ultimate perfection.

We observe that each of these stages must be traversed by the species in a fixed order and there is a natural connection between each one and the next. Because we see that this order does not change, we conclude that this species has a natural goal which it is directed toward from the first moment of its existence.

For example, if a single walnut is buried in the ground with everything it needs to grow, such as warmth and moisture, its kernel will split open and begin to grow, developing through various stages until it becomes a fully-fledged tree bearing fruits of its own. From the first moment of its existence, this was its natural purpose and the perfection towards which it was directed.

Or, to cite another example, a lamb. There is no doubt that from the moment of its conception in its mother's womb it was directed to the natural goal of its species, namely to become a fully-fledged adult sheep. It will not divert from this particular natural course; it will not choose to become an elephant or a walnut tree instead. Therefore each and every species of creature has its own path to perfection and this path has its own fixed stages that must be traversed before the creature can achieve its natural purpose, which its innate nature seeks out and for which its existence is fully endowed to pursue.

Because this natural direction comes from God, we call it a kind of divine guidance. As we have said, no creature goes astray from this guidance, which will ultimately drive it to its purpose through its gradual development and perfection and by activating the innate potentialities and abilities it has been given for this purpose. God says: *Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it* (20:50). And: *…who created and proportioned, who determined and guided, who brought forth*

1 *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*.

the pasture, then turned it into a black stubble (87:2–5).

The human species is no exception to this general rule; it too receives this general guidance. We know that from the moment of conception, the human zygote is directed to become a complete human being with all of its associated attributes and, in the course of reaching this stage, it will become an embryo, a child, a youth, an adult and finally a senior.

However, to the best of our knowledge, the human being differs from most other species in the scope of its natural needs and many deficiencies which render it incapable of looking after itself alone. In other words, a solitary human being cannot live a human life; he needs to exist with other members of his kind in a family unit and a society through marriage, cooperation and social intercourse. In doing so, the collective are able to pool their innate abilities and divide the results of their labor according to each individual's contribution.

You will recall from our previous discussions that society is not natural to the human being, in the sense that he does not form a society spontaneously out of instinct. Rather, he sees that he can benefit from other beings; he makes use of minerals, vegetables and animals to achieve his life goals. However, because other human beings are more or less equally matched to him, he is forced to come to an agreement with them which safeguards both his rights and theirs. It is by cooperating with one another and sharing the benefits of this cooperation that a society results.

In any case, human society cannot function without practical rules and collective laws that everyone respects and a guardian who enforces them in society. If this obtains then people's lives are made easy and enjoyable.

As for these practical rules, they rest on the human being's general awareness of the reality of his existence—where he comes from and where he is going. This is how various schools of thought that have influenced the way of life in different human societies. Therefore, those who believe that the human being is a material creature, that his existence ends with death and that nothing exists save matter will organise society in such a way that will guarantee them the greatest sensory pleasures and material perfections, beyond which there is nothing.

On the other hand, those who believe in the existence of a Creator beyond the material realm—such as the idolaters—base their customs and laws around pleasing the gods so that these gods will make them happy in their worldly lives. Meanwhile, those who believe in the origin and the return base their lives around what will make them happy in this worldly

life and also in the afterlife that follows death. Therefore, the forms of social living vary according to the different bases on which society rests.

As for the customs and laws themselves, were it not for the fact that they are shared and respected by all or most members of a society, then a society will lose cohesion and cease to exist.

These customs and laws take the form of general propositions such as: "It is obligatory to do X" or "It is forbidden to do X." Whatever the particular content of these propositions, they are promulgated with the interests of the society in mind, and these goals are known as the benefits and harms of actions.

You will recall that the human being only attains whatever perfection and happiness he can through the existence of a social contract in a healthy society in which virtuous laws and customs are enacted for the purpose of guaranteeing this happiness for him. This happiness is a natural form of perfection that the incomplete human being, himself a natural entity, acquires and, in doing so, is transformed into a perfect human being who is complete in his existence.

Therefore, these customs and laws—which are practical propositions based on convention (*iʿtibārī*)—are the bridge between human imperfection and human perfection. As we have said, these depend on the benefits that are attributes of human perfection, but these attributes are real things that complete the existential deficiencies that represent a human being's true needs.

The true needs of a human being are what gave rise to these practical propositions and give validity to conventional laws. By "needs" (*ḥawāʾij*) we are referring to those things the human soul seeks through its inclinations and decisions, with the approval of the intellect—the sole faculty capable of distinguishing good from evil and benefit from harm—without following base desires of which the intellect does not approve, as these are forms of animal, rather than human, perfection.

The foundations of these customs and laws must be grounded in the real needs of the human being rather than those needs determined by a person's low desires.

As we said before, every species—including the human being—has been endowed with the faculties and means necessary for it to meet its needs and follow its path to perfection. Therefore, we can conclude that the natural abilities of the human being have consequences for the practical propositions that we call laws and customs which are meant to lead

the human being to his perfection. For example, those customs and laws pertaining to diet, which take into account the fact that the human being is endowed with a means of eating, or those customs pertaining to marriage, which take into account the fact that the human being is endowed with the means of procreation.

Thus, it is clear that religion—meaning the practical principles, customs and laws which guarantee true happiness to the human being if he follows them—must take into account the needs of human nature and that its laws must be in harmony with the way in which the human being has been created. This is what God means when He says that religion is innate (*fiṭrī*): *So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind. There is no altering Allah's creation; that is the upright religion…*

If you have grasped what is meant by religion being innate, then Islam is named "the religion of human nature" (*dīn al-fiṭra*) because human nature naturally leads to Islam.

Islam is called *islām* (lit. "submission") because it involves submitting to God's will. God's will (*irāda*) is a divine attribute of act (*ṣifat al-fiʿl*) and it comprises all of the factors that went into the creation of the human being, and the exigencies of the natural order that encompass his existence. In other words, it says what he should do or not do in every situation. God says: *Indeed the religion with Allah is Islam* (3:19).

It is called "God's religion" (*dīn allāh*) because God desires His servants to follow its teachings, according to the nature of the divine will outlined above.

It is called "the way of God" (*sabīl allāh*) because it is the path which God wants the human being to follow in order to attain perfection and happiness: *Those who bar [others] from the way of Allah, and seek to make it crooked…* (7:45).

As for why "the religion of truth" (*dīn al-ḥaqq*) must be obtained by way of revelation and prophethood rather than by intellect alone, we have already explained this in our discussions of prophethood and others throughout this work.

Verses 40–47

This is the second section of the four in which God draws an argument based on the actions which are His sole purview (or, you might say, by the Divine Names related to these actions). This is firstly in order to invalidate the existence of any partners for Him and to negate the lordship and divinity of these alleged partners and, secondly, to prove the coming of the Resurrection.

اللَّهُ الَّذِى خَلَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ رَزَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ۖ هَلْ مِنْ شُرَكَآئِكُمْ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ مِنْ ذَٰلِكُمْ مِنْ شَىْءٍ ۚ سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(30:40) ***It is Allah who created you and then He provided for you, then He makes you die, then He will bring you to life. Is there anyone among your partners who does anything of that kind? Immaculate is He and exalted above any partners that they ascribe!***

Allah is the subject of the first sentence and *who created you…* is its predicate. Equally, *…who does…* is the subject of the next sentence. It is preceded by its predicate, *among your partners*.[1] The question is rhetorical with the meaning of a denial. There are other analyses of the composition of this verse.

The verse means: God is the one who is given such and such attributes, which belong to the attributes of divinity and lordship. Are there any amongst the deities you have invented who can do these things—creation, provision, bringing death or giving life? If none of them can, then it is God who is your deity and your lord. There is no god except Him.

Perhaps the reason why God repeatedly mentions creation alongside

1 These details seem more obvious in the English because of the presence of the copula "is" which is lacking in Arabic. If the sentence is analyzed differently then the placement of these copulas will change to reflect this. (Trans.)

provision, bringing death and giving life in the context of these arguments (as we have seen) is to show that provision is inseparable from creation. That is to say that some parts of creation in relation to other parts whose existence they sustain are called "provision" (*rizq*). Therefore, provision is—in reality—a kind of creation and He who creates the creation is He who provides the provision.

So they cannot argue that one of their gods is the provider or the one who gives life or the one who brings death, that another looks after human affairs, that another brings good and still another brings evil, while still agreeing that it is God alone who creates and originates all things. They cannot argue this because it is obvious (based on the above) that provision is creation as are all other functions; none of these are separable from creation. Therefore, all of these must—like creation itself—belong to Him and this leaves nothing for them to claim as the dominion of their gods.

Then God declares Himself free from the partners—*Immaculate is He and exalted above any partners that they ascribe!*

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيُذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

(30:41) *Corruption has appeared in land and sea because of the doings of the people's hands, that He may make them taste something of what they have done, so that they may come back.*

The apparent meaning of this verse is general and not specific to any particular time, place or situation. Here, *land and sea* are used in their everyday sense, encompassing the entire surface of the earth.

Corruption (*fasād*) refers to all the hardships and tribulations that have appeared all over the surface of the earth, including earthquakes, droughts, famines, epidemics, wars, raids and insecurity. In short, this is whatever spoils the proper natural order of the world, whether this is ascribed to human free-will or not. All of that is corruption that has appeared on land and sea which disrupts the harmony of human existence.

Because of the doings of the people's hands…: Meaning because of the deeds they have done such as associating partners with God or committing sins, as we have already discussed in our commentary on the verse *if the people of the towns had been faithful and Godwary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth* (7:96). We have also said,

in our earlier discussions on prophethood, that there is a direct correlation between people's deeds and cosmic events whereby one is influenced by the virtue or corruption of the other.

That He may make them taste **[li yudhīqahum]** ***something of what they have done:*** The *lām* here is purposive, meaning that whatever corruption appeared was in order that God might make them taste the consequences of some of their evil deeds; in fact so that He might make them taste the very essence of what they have done which appears in the form of evil consequences. This is only *some* (*baʿḍ*) of what they have done because God, out of His mercy, forgives some too. See the verse: *Whatever affliction that may visit you is because of what your hands have earned, and He excuses much* (42:30).

The verse is speaking of the worldly consequences of these actions, rather than the otherworldly consequences in the Hereafter. There is no evidence to suggest that this verse means that they are being made to taste the worldly consequences in the here-and-now while the otherworldly consequences are being delayed for the Day of Judgement, as this would make the implicit meaning of the phrase: "In order that He might make them taste *some of the recompense* for what they have done" while the actual implicit meaning is: "In order that He might take them taste the recompense *of some of what they have done*." This is because the reason why we would need such an implicit possessive construct (that is, "the recompense") is that what returns to them of their evil deeds in the form of corruption is the recompense of their deeds rather than the deeds themselves, therefore what they are being made to taste is the recompense of some of what they have done rather than some of the recompense of what they have done.

…so that they may come back—in other words, He makes them taste this in the hope that they will come back from their idolatry and sinning to belief in divine unity and obedience.

This verse is connected to the one before insofar as the latter argued for divine unity and declared Him above their association (*shirk*), while this verse highlights the corruption in the land that results from association—which is a grave sin (*maʿṣiya*)—and their being made to taste the evil consequences of their actions.

There are other strange interpretations proposed for this verse. Some have said that *land* refers to the land of Mecca; others that *land* means

the desolate wasteland which has no rivers, while *sea* means every village that sits on the banks of a great river; others say that *land* means the deserts and the places inhabited by nomadic tribes while the *sea* means the coastal regions and the cities that are situated beside the sea and rivers; others say that *land* means the barren wilderness while *sea* means the fertile and verdant regions; still others say that there is a omitted possessive construct that would render the meaning "*in land and* the cities of the *sea*." Perhaps the reason for such readings are the traditions that say the verse relates to a drought that afflicted Mecca as the result of a supplication by the Prophet against the Quraysh when they went to extremes in their disbelief and persisted in their obstinacy; these commentators wished to make the verse fit the occasion of revelation and, in doing so, engaged in the kind of tortuous interpretations you see above.

Some have said that *corruption in land* refers to when the son of Adam killed his brother, and *in …sea* refers to when the king in the story of Khiḍr seized every ship unjustly. However, the weakness of this interpretation is plain to see.

قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۚ كَانَ أَكْثَرُهُمْ مُشْرِكِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(30:42) ***Say: Travel over the land and then observe how was the fate of those who were before, most of whom were polytheists.***

This verse bids the Prophet to tell them to travel across the land and look at the ruins left by those who came before them; their houses are rubble, their traces have faded and their people have vanished as a result of various calamities and misfortunes. Most of them were people who associated partners with God, so God made them taste some of what they had done in order that they might take a lesson and return to belief in divine unity. Therefore, this verse serves as external evidence for the idea expressed in the previous one.

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ الْقَيِّمِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ ۖ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصَّدَّعُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(30:43) ***So set your heart on the upright religion, before there comes a day irrevocable from Allah. On that day they shall be split.***

This draws a conclusion from the previous verses, namely: Associating partners with God and rejecting the truth led to this outcome, with these consequences for those who followed this path, so set your heart on the upright religion.

…*before there comes a day irrevocable* (lā maradd lah) *from Allah* is connected to the phrase *So set…*

Maradd is an m-infinitive (*maṣdar mīmī*) meaning "to repel" and used in the sense of "something that repels." In other words, there is nothing that can repel this day sent by God. This, of course, is the Day of Resurrection.

On that day they shall be split [yaṣṣaddaʿūn]—*yaṣṣaddaʿūn* was originally *yataṣaddaʿūn* (before being altered by the rules of pronunciation). *Taṣaddu*ʿ means "for the parts of a container to be broken" but came to be used for all kinds of splitting—so it has been said. Here, some have said it means they will be split between paradise and hell. Others have said it means that they will be separated so that each individual stands alone, per the verse: *The day mankind will be like scattered moths* (101:4). Both readings have merit, but perhaps the former is closer to the apparent meaning, as we shall see below.

مَنْ كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُۦ ۖ وَمَنْ عَمِلَ صَٰلِحًا فَلِأَنفُسِهِمْ يَمْهَدُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

(30:44) ***Whoever is faithless shall face his faithlessness, and those who act righteously only prepare for their own souls.***

It appears that this verse is meant to explain the split mentioned in the previous verse. *Whoever is faithless shall face his faithlessness* means he shall face the consequences of his faithlessness (assuming the existence of an implicit possessive construct) or even his faithlessness itself which shall transform into a blaze in which he shall dwell forever. This is one of the two groups of the split.

***…and those who act righteously only prepare for their own souls* (li anfusihim yamhadūn):** "To prepare" (*mahd*) a mattress means to unroll it and spread it flat. The other group of the split consists of those who believe and do good deeds. Here, the consequent proposition (that is, *only prepare…*) appears in the plural based on the meaning (*maʿnā*) of its antecedent, while in the sentence (*Whoever is faithless…*) the consequent proposition appears in the singular in order to correspond to the

word (*lafẓ*) of its antecedent. Here, the Qur'an only mentions good deeds without mentioning faith (*īmān*) because good deeds only prosper with faith, as mentioned in the previous verse.

Therefore, the meaning is: Those who do righteous deeds—having believed—are unfurling their means of life and subsistence in the Hereafter.

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لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(30:45) *that He may reward* (li yajziya) *those who have faith and do righteous deeds out of His grace. Indeed He does not love the faithless.*

Al-Rāghib says that "to reward" (*jazāʾ*) means "to enrich and suffice."

Elsewhere, God says: *No soul shall compensate for another* (2:48). And He says: *A father shall not atone for his child, nor the child shall atone for its father* (31:33).

Jazāʾ in the sense of "sufficing" (*kifāya*) also conveys a sense of reciprocity, namely to reciprocate good with good and evil with evil. One might say: "I requited *x* with *x*."

When God says *that He may reward those who have faith and do righteous deeds out of His grace*, the *lām* in *li yajziya* signifies purpose (*ghāya*). There is also no contradiction between God saying that he is rewarding those who have faith and saying that this is done *out of His grace* (*min faḍlih*), which implies that this is not something they have earned. This because they and whatever deeds they do belong completely to God. They do not possess anything of their own selves to deserve a reward thereby! After all, how can a slave deserve anything from his owner? So, whatever He rewards them with is actually a grace (*faḍl*) which is unearned.

In spite of this fact, God—out of His grace and mercy—considers them the owners of their own deeds even while He is their real owner, and gives them a due which they have earned as a result. In doing so, He makes whatever they obtain of paradise and nearness to Him a recompense for their deeds. But even this due that He has made for them is a kind of grace!

The source of this is God's love and affection for them, because when they love their Lord they set their hearts upon the upright religion and

follow God's Messenger when he summons them to it. As a result, God loves them too: *Say: If you love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful* (3:31).

This is why the verse counts the reward and recompense given to them by God as something given in return and reciprocity for something they have done. But it simultaneously counts it as something He has given them out of His grace because even this reciprocity is a kind of grace from Him that stems from His love for them, as the verse intimates with the coda: *Indeed He does not love the faithless.*

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ يُرْسِلَ الرِّيَاحَ مُبَشِّرَاتٍ وَلِيُذِيقَكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَلِتَجْرِيَ
الْفُلْكُ بِأَمْرِهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(30:46) ***And of His signs is that He sends the winds as bearers of good news and to let you taste of His mercy, and that the ships may sail by His command, and that you may seek of His grace, and so that you may give thanks.***

The winds are described as *bearers of good news* (mubashshirāt) because they bring good news of rain by blowing before it falls.

To let you taste of His mercy is joined (in ʿ*aṭf*) to the position (*mawḍiʿ*) of *mubashshirāt* in the sentence, as both convey a sense of purpose. The meaning being: "He sends the winds to bring you good news and to let you taste of His mercy." To "taste of His mercy" means to receive various kinds of blessings as a result of the blowing winds, such as the pollination of trees, the cleansing of the air and others, all of which are contained in the unrestricted meaning of this sentence.

And that the ships might sail by His command means "because of the currents of the wind."

And that you may seek of His grace means "that you might seek of His sustenance (*rizq*)," which is an aspect of His grace.

And so that you may give thanks [laʿallakum tashkurūn] represents the spiritual purpose of this phenomenon, while the purposes mentioned before were all visible. Giving thanks (*shukr*) means using a blessing in a way that bespeaks the Source of this blessing, through verbal praise of the Source that mentions His act of blessing, and, ultimately, by worshiping Him. That is why this clause is introduced by the subjunctive particle *laʿalla* (rather than the purposive *lām* of the previous clauses), as this suggests

a wish or desire that this should be the case, while it is possible that such spiritual purposes remain unfulfilled.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ رُسُلًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِمْ فَجَاءُوهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَانْتَقَمْنَا
مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا ۖ وَكَانَ حَقًّا عَلَيْنَا نَصْرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(30:47) ***Certainly We sent apostles to their people before you, and they brought them manifest proofs. Then We took vengeance upon those who were guilty*** **(alladhīna ajramū)**, ***and it was a must for Us to help the faithful.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Jarm* literally means to cut a fruit from a tree… *ajrama* means for a tree to suffer this act, in the same way that *athmara* means for it to produce fruit, or *atmara* means for it to produce dates, or *albana* means for a cow or a goat to produce milk. *Arjama* is used metaphorically for whenever someone does something unpleasant; it is almost never used in day-to-day speech for a praiseworthy outcome.

This verse is an aside (*muʿtariḍa*) whose context appears to be explaining that the faithful are owed something by their Lord, namely to help them in this world and the next and to take vengeance upon those who were guilty. This is a right that God has given them over Himself. One should not imagine that this entails God being compelled or ordered around by someone else!

Then We took vengeance **(fa intaqmnā)** ***upon those who were guilty:*** The *fāʾ* here is implicative (*fāʾ faṣīḥah*),[1] in other words "some of them believed and some were guilty, *then We took vengeance upon those who were guilty.*"

And it was a must for Us to help the faithful: That is, by saving them from punishment and destroying their enemies. This verse implies that taking vengeance on the guilty was done on behalf of the faithful and that this was a kind of help (*naṣr*).

1 An "implicative *fāʾ*" is one that expresses an implicit clause in speech. In this case, the Qur'an says God sent prophets to people with manifest proofs, and it is implied by the next clause on vengeance that some of the people believed while others were guilty. (Trans.)

Examining Narrations

(1) About the verse *Corruption has appeared in land and sea because of the doings of the people's hands* (30:41), *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: "In land" (*fi al-birr*) means the ruin of the animals when there is no rain, and the same is true regarding the death of the beasts of the sea.

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "The life of the animals on land depends on rain. When there are no rains, then corruption appears in the land and sea. This happens because of an abundance of sinning."[1]

Author's comments: This interpretation is a case of applying the verse to an external referent (*al-jary*).

(3) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked about the verse *Say: Travel over the land and then observe how was the fate of those who were before…*(30:42). He said: It means consider the Qur'an and see what the outcome was of those who came before you.[2]

(4) Concerning the verse *…and whoever acts righteously only prepare for their own souls* (30:44), relates from Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Righteous deeds will surely reach paradise before their doer and will prepare his place there in the same way as a servant goes ahead and prepares his mattress for his master.[3]

(5) God's Messenger said: "There is no man who defends the honor of his brother save that it is God's duty to defend him from the fires of hell on the Day of Judgement." Then he recited: *And it was a must for Us to help the faithful*.[4]

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

2 *Al-Kāfi*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū al-Rabīʿ al-Shāmī.

3 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, on the authority of Manṣūr b. Ḥāzim.

4 *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, on the authority of Umm al-Dardāʾ. This is also narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātam, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh on the authority of Abū al-Dardāʾ.

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Verses 48-53

This is the third set of verses to draw an argument from God's actions or, if you like, the divine names of His actions. The main purpose of this argument is to demonstrate the truth of the Resurrection (*maʿād*) as the bulk of the polytheists' stubborn denial [of the Qur'anic message] was directed to the belief that they would be raised from the dead. Denying this, however, renders all the laws and teachings of Islam pointless and, indeed, renders belief in God's unity (*tawḥīd*) pointless. God follows this argument by telling the Prophet not to hold out hope that they will accept his arguments but to focus on inviting those people who are already predisposed to faith, who are worthy of Islam and who will submit to the truth.

اللَّهُ الَّذِی یُرْسِلُ الرِّیَاحَ فَتُثِیرُ سَحَابًا فَیَبْسُطُهُ فِی السَّمَاءِ كَیْفَ یَشَاءُ وَیَجْعَلُهُ كِسَفًا فَتَرَى الْوَدْقَ یَخْرُجُ مِنْ خِلَالِهِ ۖ فَإِذَا أَصَابَ بِهِ مَنْ یَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ إِذَا هُمْ یَسْتَبْشِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(30:48) ***It is Allah who sends the winds. Then they raise a cloud, then He spreads it as He wishes in the sky, and forms it into fragments, whereat you see the rain issuing from its midst. Then, when He strikes with it whomever of His servants that He wishes, behold, they rejoice.***

"To raise" (*ithāra*) means to move and spread; the word used for "cloud" here is *saḥāb*, and "the sky" (*samāʾ*) means "the upwards direction"; whatever is above you and over you is part of the *samāʾ*. "Fragments" (*kisaf*) is the plural of *kisfa*, which means "a piece of something." The word used for rain here is *wadq*, which means "drops of rain," while "midst" is *khilāl*, which is the plural of *khalal*, meaning "a gap."

The verse means that God is the one who sends winds to move and spread clouds; He spreads these clouds high in the air however He wishes, combining them and putting them one atop another to form new pieces. Then you see the rain issuing forth from them. He strikes whichever of His servants He wishes with that rain, whereat they rejoice because this

rain is the substance of their life and the life of their crops and herds.

وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمُبْلِسِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(30:49) ***and indeed they had, before it was sent down upon them, been despondent earlier.***

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"Despondent" (*iblās*) carries a similar meaning to "despair" (*yaʾs*) or *qunūṭ* (to be disheartened).

The pronoun "it" in *it was sent down* refers to the rain. It is said that *earlier* (min qablih) means "before the rain," in which case this serves to emphasize the meaning of *before it was sent down upon them* (*min qabl an yunazzal ʿalayhim*). According to this reading, the emphasis shows how quickly human hearts change from despair to joy. This is because the phrase *before it was sent down to them* could signify an expansive period of time, therefore the emphasis *earlier* shows that this was near at hand.

In *al-Kashshāf*, we read that *earlier* is a kind of repetition and emphasis, as when God says: *So the fate of both is that they will be in the Fire, to remain in it forever* (59:17). The point of this emphasis is to show that they had been waiting for rain for so long that they were gripped by despair, so that when the rains came their joy was proportional to the despair which they had felt.

Some might also say that the pronoun in "earlier" (*min qablih*) could refer to the sending of the winds. In other words, before the rain was sent down on them, they had been despondent until the winds were sent.

فَانْظُرْ إِلَىٰ آثَارِ رَحْمَتِ اللَّهِ كَيْفَ يُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ لَمُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ ۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

(30:50) ***So observe the effects of Allah's mercy: how He revives the earth after its death! Indeed That is the reviver of the dead, and He has power over all things.***

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"Effects" (*āthār*) is the plural of *athar*, which literally means the trace that something leaves behind, such as a footprint, or the ruin of a building. The term is used metaphorically to signify a thing's results.

Here, the meaning of *Allah's mercy* is the rain that descended from the clouds which had been spread by the winds and the *effects* of this mercy are its results such as the plants, trees and fruits, which are also the effects

of the earth returning to life after it was dead.

That is why the Qur'an says *observe the effects of Allah's mercy* as the effects of this mercy, represented by the rain, show how the earth is revived when it is dead. Therefore, the revival of the earth, and the plants, trees and fruits, which are the effects of its life, are all counted amongst the effects of God's mercy. And this system, as a whole, is produced by the creation of the winds, the clouds and the rain.

Indeed That is the reviver of the dead: *That* refers to God, as it is His mercy that revives the earth after its death. The Qur'an uses the demonstrative pronoun *that*—which usually signifies something at a distance—to magnify and glorify God. Of course, the real meaning of *the dead* here is not the earth, but the human being and other living creatures.

Indeed That is the reviver of the dead serves to underscore the similarity between reviving the dead earth and reviving the dead. Both kinds of death involve the absence of the effects of living from something preserved, and life represents a resumption of those effects after their absence. This happens visibly in the earth and its plants, and here the Qur'an says that the life of human beings and other living creatures are no different, therefore if it is possible to revive the earth, so too must it be possible to revive the dead.

…and He has power over all things affirms the above revival through another explanation, namely that God's power is absolute and such unlimited power includes the power to bring the dead back to life, otherwise this power would not be absolute or unlimited in the first place.

وَلَئِنْ أَرْسَلْنَا رِيحًا فَرَأَوْهُ مُصْفَرًّا لَظَلُّوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ يَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

(30:51) ***And if We send a wind and they see it turn yellow, they will surely become ungrateful after that.***

The pronoun "it" in *see it turn yellow* refers to the vegetation. This is understood from the context. *They will surely become…* is the object of an oath (*jawāb al-qasam*), which functions as a consequent proposition to *And if We send…* This renders the meaning: "And I swear that if We send a cold wind and strike their crops and trees yellow, they will surely become ungrateful for His blessings."

This verse reprimands those who are fickle, changing with every turn of fortune. If they receive a blessing, they hasten to rejoice, but if God

takes some of what He has given them out of His grace, they immediately become ungrateful for even the most obvious of blessings!

Some say that the pronoun in *see it turn yellow* refers to the clouds because when the clouds are yellow in color, this means they will not rain. Others say that it refers to the wind, because *rīḥ* can be either masculine or feminine. However, both opinions are unlikely.

فَإِنَّكَ لَا تُسْمِعُ الْمَوْتَىٰ وَلَا تُسْمِعُ الصُّمَّ الدُّعَاءَ إِذَا وَلَّوْا مُدْبِرِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِهَادِ الْعُمْيِ عَنْ ضَلَالَتِهِمْ ۖ إِنْ تُسْمِعُ إِلَّا مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا فَهُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(30:52-53) ***Indeed you cannot make the dead hear, nor can you make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs, nor can you lead the blind out of their error. You can make hear only those who have faith in Our signs, and thus have submitted.***

This explains the wisdom of what was implied in the above verses. It is as if God says to His Messenger: "Do not be anxious or grieve for those who are so changeable—joyous one moment and despondent the next—and who disbelieve because they will not have faith in our signs or ponder upon them. They are the dead, the deaf and the blind, and you cannot make them hear or guide them. The only ones who hear and are guided are those who believe in our signs—meaning they ponder on these arguments and believe in them as a result; they are those who have submitted."

And the full explanation of these two verses has already been given in our commentary on Sūrah al-Naml.

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Verses 54 to 60

This is the fourth set of verses. It resembles the one before it and contains the conclusion of the Chapter.

اللَّهُ الَّذِى خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ ضَعْفٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ضَعْفٍ قُوَّةً ثُمَّ جَعَلَ
مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ ضَعْفًا وَشَيْبَةً ۚ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْقَدِيرُ ﴿٥٤﴾

(30:54) ***It is Allah who created you from weakness, then He gave you power after weakness. Then, after power, He ordained weakness and old age. He creates whatever He wishes, and He is the All-knowing, the All-powerful.***

"Weakness" (*ḍaʿf*) and "power" (*quwwa*) are opposites.

The particle "from" (*min*) in "from weakness" (*min al-ḍaʿf*) signifies a beginning. In other words, "Your creation began from weakness" or, "You began as weaklings." The opposition of weakness and power in the verse suggests that this refers to infancy, even though this could also apply to one's seed.

The meaning of "power after weakness" means reaching maturity, while "after power, weakness" means old age. "And old age" (*shayba*) is joined to weakness as an explanatory conjunction. "Weakness" and "power" are both left indefinite (*nakira*) to signify ambiguity (*ibhām*) and the lack of a specific level of weakness or power because all individuals are different.

He creates whatever He wishes: It means that just as He wills weakness and creates it, He then wills power and creates it, then wills weakness again and creates it. This intimates that the succession of states that the human goes through in his life is actually an act of creation and therefore it is something that God does. In other words, one cannot say (as the idol-worshipers do) that this is something that done by the deity particular to human beings.

Then He mentions knowledge and power in the coda: *and He is the All-knowing, the All-powerful.*

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُقْسِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ مَا لَبِثُوا غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ كَانُوا

يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

(30:55) ***And on the day when the Hour sets in the guilty will swear that they had remained only for an hour. That is how they were used to lying.***

This verse serve as an afterword to the above verses which enumerate the divine signs and arguments for God's oneness and the Resurrection while simultaneously laying the ground for the verses which conclude the Chapter. Having gone through a number of signs and arguments and intimated that the audience are not people who should be expected or anticipated to believe, God then wishes to show that they are ignorant of the truth; they receive true speech as falsehood and clear signs as meaningless. Therefore, they lie, and they will have no excuse for themselves.

In fact, their deceit and turning from truth to falsehood will remain with them even on the Day of Resurrection, when they will think that merely an hour of the day had passed while they were between death and resurrection in their graves. The matter of the resurrection will be unclear to them just as every truth before it has been, so they will think it false!

And on the day when the Hour sets in the guilty will swear that they had remained only for an hour: This bespeaks their inability to distinguish between this world and the Day of Resurrection; they will think it an hour like any hour of this world.

That is how they were used to lying—how they would turn from truth to falsehood; even when they were called to the truth and given proofs and evidences for it, they would call it falsehood or superstition.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ وَالْإِيمَانَ لَقَدْ لَبِثْتُمْ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْبَعْثِ ۖ فَهَٰذَا يَوْمُ الْبَعْثِ وَلَٰكِنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(30:56) ***But those who were given knowledge and faith will say: Certainly you remained in Allah's Book until the Day of Resurrection. This is the Day of Resurrection, but you did not know.***

This is the faithful's response to the guilty's claim that *they had remained only for an hour*. Because the guilty are so attached to this world and hope to live in it forever, they cannot see a difference between the Day

of Resurrection and this world; they think the same rules apply. So they imagine that an hour is a short duration of time. It as if they are still in this world because that is the extent of their knowledge.

However, those with knowledge and faith respond by saying that the period of time between this world and the Day of Resurrection is the one that God describes in Sūrah al-Muʾminūn as: *And ahead of them is a barrier until the day they will be resurrected* (23:100). From this they deduce that this day is the Day of Resurrection. But, because the guilty are in doubt about this and have no certainty about anything beyond this world, they think that merely an hour has passed. This is the meaning of the words: *Certainly you remained in Allah's Book until the Day of Resurrection. This is the Day of Resurrection, but you did not know.*

Based on this, it is clear that the description *given knowledge and faith* refers to having certainty (*yaqīn*) and adhering to what it entails; knowledge here means having certainty about God and His signs, while faith means adhering to what that certainty entails regarding God's gifts. Therefore, it appears that "God's Book" (*kitāb allāh*) refers to the divine scriptures or just the Qur'an.[1]

Claims that there is an unusual word order (*taqdīm wa taʾkhīr*) in the verse, to the effect that "Those who were given knowledge and faith in the Book of God will say: Certainly you remained…" should also be discounted.

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يَنْفَعُ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مَعْذِرَتُهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُسْتَعْتَبُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(30:57) *On that day the excuses of the wrongdoers will not benefit them, nor will they be asked to propitiate.*

"Propitiation" (*ʿutbā*) is to acknowledge one's wrongdoing in an effort to appease the one who is rebuking you. However, the verse is saying that no excuse will avail them of their wrongdoing, nor will they be expected to do anything to ward off rebuke.

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ ۚ وَلَئِنْ جِئْتَهُمْ بِآيَةٍ لَيَقُولَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا مُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

1 It is also possible that this could be referring to the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), based on the verse *This is Our book, which speaks truly against you* (45:29), according to the explanation given of this verse later on. (Auth.)

(30:58) ***Certainly we have drawn for mankind in this Qur'an every parable. Indeed if you bring them a sign, the faithless will surely say: You are nothing but fabricators!***

This implies that they are so far from the truth that no parable will help to bring their hearts towards it because their hearts have been sealed.

Indeed if you bring them a sign, the faithless will surely say: You are nothing but fabricators! In other words, they will accuse you of bringing them a falsehood. They say this because they are so far from the truth that they see every truth as falsehood. The Qur'an uses *the faithless* (alladhīna kafarū) instead of the pronoun "they" to show the reason why they say this.

كَذَٰلِكَ يَطْبَعُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(30:59) ***Thus does Allah seal the hearts of those who do not know.***

In other words, He seals the hearts of those who do not know Him or His signs, one of which is the Resurrection. And they wilfully persist in their ignorance and doubt.

فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ ۖ وَلَا يَسْتَخِفَّنَّكَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(30:60) ***So be patient! Allah's promise is indeed true. And do not let yourself be upset by those who have no conviction.***

In other words, be patient in what you face from them, such as their saying: *You are nothing but fabricators!,* and their derision and scorn. God's promise to help the faithful is true, as He has said above: *and it was a must for Us to help the faithful.* Do not be troubled by those who have no conviction in God's promise.

Some say: *No conviction* means "no conviction in the clear signs that you recite to them," which they show by denying them and harassing you with falsehoods. However, this reading is baseless as the Chapter begins with a promise and concludes with a promise, and both promises are to help the faithful.

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End of Chapter & Volume. All praise is due to God